# Weaving Together:

# An Exploration of Succession Planning in

# Rural Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions

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By
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## Dedication and acknowledgements

To my father, Dr. Cashman Mason, from whom I inherited a strong work ethic, and who reminded me in his final conversation with me that I need to be intentional about making time to rest.

To my exceedingly supportive husband, Josh, who enabled my doctorate journey from day one and worked hard so I could find little pockets of time to heed my father's advice.

To my wonderfully delightful children, Ethan and Madeline, who were longsuffering with all the time I spent in the office and motivated me every time you asked "how many more words, Mom?" I am so proud of who you are and am thankful now to spend more time with you as you continue to grow and discover.

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## Abstract

There is a real concern about the increasing vacancies for corporate and higher education leadership positions. It is essential that planning and preparing take place for these vacancies. However, despite an ever-evolving body of organizational research literature regarding succession and leadership development, there is a perceived gap in the evidence base on best practices for higher education, particularly within Canada, and especially in rural Canadian post-secondary institutions.

This primarily qualitative study uses an informed grounded theoretical framework with a social constructivist lens. By learning more about the succession planning experiences of those who are likely to be subjects and initiators of succession planning systems, this study aims to inform future developments in succession planning in Canadian post-secondary institutions operating in rural centres.

Based on semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with post-secondary leaders working in seven of the 13 Canadian provinces and territories a new model was formed through an iterative and reflexive analysis of the data, emergent themes, and literature.

The new model provides a framework which employees, supervisors, and institutions could use to support constructive dialogue and action plans for individuals to hone their leadership practice fit for Canadian post-secondary. Challenging the common pipeline metaphor, the model proposes weaving together learning-by-doing opportunities through multiple touchpoints with people throughout the organization and beyond. Additionally, the model encourages institutions to consider the desired leadership competencies and accountabilities to facilitate a cohesively-,

yet organically-, built succession planning system. A system based on human connection and conversation with the goal to meet institutional leadership workforce needs, and optimize employees' career goals. In this way, it is hoped the anticipated leadership deficit can be alleviated.

**Keywords:** Succession planning, rural, management, higher education, post-secondary, leadership pipeline, leadership development, informed grounded theory, weaving

## Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet the requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.

Tiffany Snauwaert

July 20, 2020

## Gender neutrality

While Canada is a large and vast country, the public post-secondary sector, and particularly the membership of the organization Colleges and Institutes Canada, is interconnected through networking opportunities and inter-institutional personnel movement. Therefore, in order to protect the anonymity of the interview participants, gender neutral pronouns such as they, them, and their have been used when referring to one or more participants. Gender neutral pronouns have also been used when referring to authors and researchers in keeping with an inclusive social narrative to move away from binary classification.

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# Chapter 1:

# Introduction to the Research

> "Our legacy will be written not in the good things that we have done as…leaders, but in the great things that our successor will do."
>
> - David McKenna (2015, p. 123)

Throughout my career in Canadian post-secondary, I have attended varying levels of sectoral meetings. As a teaching faculty member and program coordinator, I attended provincial articulation meetings. As Chair of the School of Business and my institution's Education Council (similar to an Academic Council or Senate in other institutions) I attended provincial academic governance meetings. As Dean of three departments (Business, Community Education and Workplace Training, and Environment & Geomatics) I attended provincial and national meetings with my senior leader colleagues to network and develop our professional practice. Invariably at each level of my career the topic of who is in leadership at each institution (e.g., who's in, who's out, who's looking) is discussed, as institutional turnover is a challenging sectoral norm.

Additionally, many side conversations take place with colleagues about the challenges of finding quality leaders, minimizing turnover, and on a personal level how people are navigating the political climates within their institutions to advance their career. Competition for effective leaders is active in this public sector industry that is not always able to attract people due to limitations on its capacity to offer competitive salaries as compared to the private sector. As provincial/territorial governments come and go in a country where tertiary education is the responsibility of provincial/territorial governments, rather than the country's federal government (Jones, 2014), political and policy agendas fluctuate, which can impact institutions' funding and

ability to keep pace with industry salaries, resulting in challenges to keep or attract effective leaders.

Regardless of the level of these discussions, it is clear that it matters who our leaders are. It matters how they manage and lead. But in times of shrinking ratios between resources and needs, and increased external drivers of change, how can public post-secondary education in Canada maintain global competitiveness with its leadership in such turbulent times of turnover?

**The Problem**

Over a decade ago, there were several predictions of high turnover amongst North American senior leaders in higher education (HE), with forecasts ranging between 50 and 84 percent (Betts, Urias, Chavez, & Betts, 2008). According to a 2016 survey of American community college Chief Executive Officers, there is no sign of this slowing down. The study found that 80 percent of the Presidents indicated they would retire within ten years and 35 percent in five years (Phillippe, 2016). Researchers have characterized this anticipated and current turnover to be cause for great concern (Evans, Hess, Abdelhamid, & Stepleman, 2016). Of course, academia is not alone in needing to face this human resources challenge, as turnover is anticipated across a variety of industries (Bower, 2007; Brinker, 2018; Charan, 2005; Karaevli & Hall, 2003; Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2006). According to a survey of the World Economic Forum's study of its Global Agenda Council members spanning 87 countries, Shahid (2015) found the third-highest global concern was a lack of leadership, and 86 percent believed there to be a global crisis in leadership. While these results speak to the lack of effective leaders, one could extend this finding to infer that the shortage is due to a lack of effectively developed leaders. Bower

(2007) suggested in their *Harvard Business Review* article that this leadership crisis is partly due to a lack of leadership commitment to identify and develop an entity's employees. Drotter and Charan (2001) posited that the lack of people ready and able to fill leadership vacancies is due to a lack of, or breakdown, of leadership development processes within organizations.

Higher educational institutions have a reputation for slow processes regarding identifying and training future leaders (Grossman, 2014). A recruitment consultant from the United States was cited as observing that US colleges were slower than the private sector to find and develop talent. In contrast, the private sector was more resourceful and active in finding and developing talent (Selingo & Carlson, 2006). The American Council on Education reported in 2006 that while the idea of training people for succession to fill inevitable leadership gaps was common and long-standing in American industry, it was virtually unheard of in HE. Ten years later, Bennett described higher education as having "a long and inglorious track record when it comes to identifying, developing, and selecting leaders" (2015, para. 2).

In 1986, 42 percent of American university presidents were 50 years old or younger; 30 years later, only eight percent were younger than 50 (Bass & Lanier, 2008 as cited in Klein & Salk, 2013). American college presidents' figures were similar in 2016, with only eight percent younger than 50 years old, and 58 percent over 60 years old (American Council on Education, 2017). Selingo and Carlson (2006) referenced a recruitment consultant who found in the American HE context that senior-level college searches took longer with a smaller pool of candidates as there were fewer people aged between 35 and 44 who were ready to take over the retiring baby boomer generation. At time of writing, I was not able to find statistics for Canadian HE, although Canadian demographics tend to be similar to that in America.

Anecdotally, to support this supposition, all three of my institution's vice presidents retired in the academic year of 2017-18. Despite the demographics, planning for leadership vacancies seems to gain more attention when immediate vacancies arise unexpectedly (Rothwell, 2011). This "replacement planning" (Rothwell, 2011, p. 88) focuses on finding people to fill acting positions. If we relate this reactive and short-term approach in planning to models of thinking, perhaps the most applicable type is Argyris' (1976) organizational learning theory of single and double-loop learning.

Single-loop learning comes from Argyris' (1976) influential organizational learning theory where responses are made using prevailing behaviors (Azadegan, Srinivasan, Blome, & Tajeddini, 2019). Instead, researchers recommend double-loop learning to explore past experiences to inform new possible courses of action (Mano, 2010). Double-loop learning involves flexible responses (Azadegan et al., 2019). Regarding the HE "leadership vacuum" (Moser, 2008, p. B8) organizations are recommended to actively interpret their surroundings (Daft & Weick, 1984) but still adhere to Ashby's postmodern law of requisite variety (to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2) where an organization acknowledges any number of possible outcomes (Boisot & McKelvey, 2007). Responding to upcoming leadership vacancies by merely posting vacancies and hoping to get lucky in finding the right person for the job (i.e., single-loop approach), does not allow for consistent organizational reflection and consideration and implementation of best strategies with a view to continuous improvement (i.e., double-loop).

For organizations (HE or otherwise) that are facing any host of forces of change, they need to be able to drive change in response to environmental factors to be sustainable. Geletkanycz and Black (2001) found in their quantitative study that leaders who undergo career development

are more likely to challenge institutional status quo and “embrace strategic change” (p. 19). Accordingly, they concluded that looking more closely at recruitment and development is warranted to address the necessity to reconsider the status quo. The American Council on Education (2006) quoted an executive search firm leader, Dennis Barden, who suggested it is hard to think of any industry more committed to status quo operations than the academy. Higher education was, in Barden's view, created to be stable, operate outside of current trends, and resist internal change. However, for HE to be able to adapt to external drivers of change, the attraction to infuse some outside perspective through external hiring often outweighs the benefits of internally recruiting, with the goal to bring in different ideas and methods (American Council, 2006) through external recruits who may be more attuned to change from other sectors.

Perhaps a contributing factor to HE inertia is higher education’s unique adoption of shared governance. Olson (2009) opined that the term shared governance elicits different interpretations but argued it provides for a variety of groups to have a place in decisions, such as through elected positions, while still allowing particular groups to have the chief responsibility for decision-making. Therefore, multiple perspectives can be integrated in decision-making, which may be missing when rapid decision-making occurs to adapt to external factors. Richards (2009) observed it may be best for leaders to delay decisions until after they have developed relationships across all internal stakeholder groups such as administration, faculty, students, the Board, and others to enhance buy-in for various initiatives. However, this delay may also be a contributing factor to Boards and others responsible for hiring executive leaders to bring in outsider leaders to effect change more quickly.

With a view to organizational sustainability, the private sector has long turned to the idea of succession planning, which Barton defines as "deliberate strategic process to plan for the future needs of the organization, which includes advancing the skills and experiences of leaders through leadership development" (2019, p. 39) so the organization has an abundance of people who can fill both anticipated and unanticipated vacancies as they arise (Charan, Noel, & Drotter, 2011) and not just at the leadership level but all levels (Beyers, 2006). The goal is for succession planning to be a system that is "transparent and repeatable" (Barton, 2019, p. 43) that benefits not only organizations, but also employees' careers so an organization can proactively identify and develop prospective leaders to address future organizational needs (Adams, 2013). While succession planning may look different depending on the context, Barton (2019) suggested some or all of the following to be succession planning best practices: make succession planning and leadership development an organizational strategic priority, deepen the succession planning approach to address all levels of the organization, allow for flexibility and differentiation within succession planning practices, and design the system to be transparent and repeatable.

I became particularly aware of these issues in my organization when all three of our Vice-Presidents retired within one year. Before I joined the academy, I worked in public accountancy. Once in higher education, I was intrigued by the different interpretations of succession planning in HE and its implementation. In times when HE struggles to find effective leaders (for current and looming vacancies) how can the collegial nature of shared governance in HE work in tandem with the globalization and corporatization of higher education? Through this thesis project, I will attempt to build an understanding of what succession planning in HE could look like in today's

reality, especially in Canadian rural institutions, as that is my current professional context where I work as Dean.

## Canadian Post-Secondary Context

Higher education is the responsibility of the provinces and territories in Canada, rather than the national government. There is no federal HE ministry or overarching policy or assessment and accreditation structure (Jones, 2014). Jones (2014) argued that this results in a highly decentralized system where there is limited long-term planning. And yet, despite the fragmented nature of HE policy and funding, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2014), Canada has the highest rates of post-secondary participation amongst the 35 OECD member countries. The concept of shared governance is embedded in many public institutions across the country following the model suggested by an early 20$^{th}$ century provincial commission where academic policy is the responsibility of an internal academic governance body and overall administration is the responsibility of a governing Board, resulting in a bicameral structure (Jones, 2014). Perhaps this system of accountability through shared governance is a contributing factor to why Canadian HE is more coherent in approach than it might otherwise be.

The size and infrastructure of HE systems differ amongst the provinces and territories as evidenced by the following table:

***Table 1.1: Area, population, enrolment by province and territory***

| Jurisdiction | | Area km$^2$ | 2020 Population | 2016/17 total post-secondary enrolments (all institution types) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Provinces** | | | | |
| 1. | Newfoundland and Labrador | 373,872 | 521,279 | 26,391 |
| 2. | Prince Edward Island | 5,660 | 157,614 | 6,378 |
| 3. | Nova Scotia | 53,338 | 978,037 | 55,116 |
| 4. | New Brunswick | 71,450 | 780,430 | 27,351 |
| 5. | Quebec | 1,365,128 | 8,538,867 | 532,176 |
| 6. | Ontario | 917,741 | 14,701,734 | 813,351 |
| 7. | Manitoba | 553,556 | 1,377,039 | 62,841 |
| 8. | Saskatchewan | 591,670 | 1,180,406 | 55,827 |
| 9. | Alberta | 642,317 | 4,411,863 | 190,947 |
| 10. | British Columbia | 925,186 | 5,114,357 | 277,941 |
| **Territories** | | | | |
| 1. | Yukon | 474,391 | 41,083 | - |
| 2. | Northwest Territories | 1,183,085 | 44,997 | - |
| 3. | Nunavut | 1,936,113 | 38,975 | - |
| | Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut (combined) | - | - | 3,546 |
| **Total** | | 9,093,507 | 37,886,681 | 2,051,865 |
| **Source** | | (World Atlas, 2020) | (Statistics, 2020) | (Statistics, 2019) |

Table 1.1 illustrates how geographical size is not necessarily indicative of infrastructural size or enrolments.

Adding to this quantitative complexity the country is also grappling with the process of reconciliation with its Indigenous peoples, partly in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 calls to action (2015) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' calls for justice (2019). The work of reconciliation may look different depending where you are. For instance, British Columbia (BC) made history when Bill 41 was voted in unanimously (that is voted for across all political parties), where the government is to align all of its policies and legislation with the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*' principles. BC is the first Canadian jurisdiction to enact this (Larsen, 2019). At time of writing, it remains to be seen how Bill 41 will impact HE in BC. Canadian higher education is also reflecting on how it can decolonize its systems and processes so as to better serve Indigenous populations.

Similar to the population and topographical differences found across the country, education systems and funding models differ across the country. As I think back to the national meetings I attend, in addition to the discussion about institutional leadership turnover dynamics, we also discuss the varying funding models, how various Canadian institutions and governments respond to the above noted complexities, and the impacts that a change in government can have on our respective organizations and jurisdictions. The possible types of institution (e.g. university, college, university-college) can depend on the jurisdiction and the current political agenda. Jurisdictions have the authority to change the kind of credentials a particular institution may confer, not always in consultation with the institutions. Manager remuneration may or may not

be mandated by jurisdictional governments. The culture of manager mobility may also vary depending on the provincial or municipal context. For example, in a larger urban centre there is likely to be multiple post-secondary institutions with leadership positions available which HE leaders could apply for without needing to uproot themselves or their families. In a smaller jurisdiction, municipal or provincial/territorial, there may very well be only one post-secondary 'game in town' for those wanting to work in higher education. My colleagues often remark that while our situational, geographical and cultural contexts may differ, the thematic challenges we all face have commonalities. It is against this diverse yet common national context, that I am interested to explore what thematic differences and commonalities may emerge as a result of this succession planning research project.

**Responsiveness, Originality, and Aim of Study**

Research regarding the succession event and succession planning has been building over the last 60 years with a primary focus on the American private sector. Montlha Pila, Schultz, and Dachapalli (2016) suggested in their survey of South African government succession that succession literature has not substantively considered the public sector. As discussed in Chapter 2, I noted there is a lack of research regarding HE succession planning, particularly within a Canadian context. Despite Kesner and Sebora's call in 1994 for researchers to diversify the body of succession knowledge beyond archival data, Giambatista, Rowe, and Riaz (2005) still found a lack of diverse methods in succession literature and encouraged future researchers to incorporate surveys and interviews in their work.

As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the principal research methodologies used have been quantitative, predominantly through a positivist lens. To respond to calls for more diverse research on succession in the public sector, including higher education, particularly Canadian HE, my research was undertaken. This project contributes to the body of succession literature by utilizing more focused contextualization and diverse methods. It is particularly original in that it focuses on the stratum of Canadian higher education – and the unit of analysis being rural post-secondary institutions - that, to my knowledge, has never been undertaken. While conducting interviews for this research, interviewees often validated the importance of this research by acknowledging that succession planning in HE is a significant challenge which needs to be addressed more proactively.

**Research Question and its Significance**

This research aims to apprise rural Canadian post-secondary institutions of succession planning alternatives by learning about the lived experiences of post-secondary leaders with succession planning and leadership development. Therefore, my main research question to be explored throughout this paper is:

*How can the lived succession planning experiences of rural Canadian higher education institutional administrators provide insights into how institutions might improve their succession planning practices?*

As discussed in Chapter 3, this research question will be supported by supplementary research questions, which explore such issues as how institutions' succession planning and leadership development impact employees and how HE leaders might like to see their

institution's succession planning change. I strive, as a practitioner-researcher, to incorporate servant leadership principles into my leadership practice as a Dean in a small BC college. Although servant leadership theory continues to evolve (Kiker, Scully Callahan, & Kiker, 2019), the principles I am most familiar with are: "Empowering and developing people, Humility, Authenticity, Interpersonal acceptance, Providing direction, Stewardship" (van Dierendonck, 2011, p. 1233). I want to see my direct and indirect reports empowered to embark and continue on journeys of personal and career development that are meaningful and impactful to them and our institution. On a broader scale, I am also committed to public post-secondary education, and I observe that for public post-secondary education to sustain and thrive in such a disruptive global environment where challenges and opportunities abound, the building of HE leadership capacity is vital to its longevity and relevance. I believe that exploring the research question can help me in my leadership practice, as well as my institutional and sectoral colleagues, my institution, and, ultimately, the post-secondary sector.

**Outline of Thesis**

I begin this paper with an overview of the continued need for succession planning research despite its 60-year history of evolving literature, and my planned approach to the study, all with the research aim in mind. I then follow with a literature review in Chapter 2 before outlining my methodological approach, including my methods of choice, in Chapter 3. In Chapters 4 and 5, I outline my findings and resulting discussion and data analysis in response to the research questions. Chapter 6 offers my conclusions and recommendations based on the discussion mentioned above, and the limitations of my study and suggestions for possible future research.

# Chapter 2:

# Initial Literature Review

This chapter provides a high-level progression of the literature over its history, along with an identified gap in the literature and methodologies used thus far. It then goes on to review relevant theories that could inform this study concerning the research questions. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, I used an informed grounded theory approach, which calls to move away from a classic grounded theory methodology (where a literature review is delayed so as not to be influenced by past empirical research). Under an informed grounded theory approach, I am able to benefit from engaging with the literature prior to conducting research. Further literature review will take place in Chapter 5 while discussing and analysing the data.

Succession planning is more than merely planning for one's replacement; it also endeavours to address the areas of development for existing employees (Rothwell, 2011). As vital as the topic of succession planning is, Cembrowski and da Costa (1998) found there was a lack of succession planning research in HE when they conducted their naturalistic inquiry of seven Western Canadian educational managers from one institution. Morrin (2013) drew the same conclusions during their sequential mixed-methods case study of a Central Canadian institution. Today, more than twenty years after Cembrowski and da Costa's (1998) study, there has been little further research on the topic regarding HE in Canada. Therefore, as recommended by Cembrowski and da Costa (1998), I turned to research on the subject from business literature. Datta and Guthrie (1994) observed that organizational theorists, strategic management researchers, and human resource management researchers have all been investigating the topic of succession, with succession planning as a subset - so there is a wealth of literature, at least from the corporate viewpoint.

Throughout the years, authors have used a variety of metaphors to try to conceptualize the idea of planning for succession and developing leaders. Those of most note are: pools (Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Greer & Virick, 2008) as in pools of talent that could be developed or surveyed for potential leaders; war as some suggest that there is a war for talent amongst businesses (Kwon, Bae, & Lawler, 2010); horse races (Friedman & Olk, 1995) to describe the process of internal candidates jockeying for leadership positions; relays (Vancil, 1987; Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2004) to describe the process of deliberately planning to hand over the baton of leadership from one to another; heirs (Vancil, 1987) particularly referring to a person who is being groomed for a specific position; and ladders (Conger & Fulmer, 2003) wherein there are various rungs that one has to climb to get to the top of the organizational hierarchy. But, perhaps, the most widespread metaphor surrounding this topic is that of a pipeline, which was first coined in Charan, Noel, and Drotter's (2001) seminal book on developing leaders with a pipeline approach.

Charan et al. (2011) defined their ideal vision of succession planning where organizations can perpetuate themselves by filling every organizational level with high performers, so there is an abundance of qualified people who can fill vacancies as they arise. Many authors and researchers have continued to use this metaphor both in business and higher education up to the present day. Beyers expanded on the pipeline metaphor to explain that institutions need to be planning for "strategic and operational effectiveness" (2006, p. 312) with the view that each person in an organization can be a leader. More recently, Baker, Lunsford, and Pifer (2018) described the leadership pipeline as a methodical and visible system, which includes development programs and processes to identify individuals for succession.

**The Beginnings**

Academic interest in succession planning started well before the development of useful metaphors. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Fayol (cited in Klein & Salk, 2013; Richards, 2009), known by some as the father of management study (Voxted, 2017), was one of the first to start the conversation regarding succession and management theory. Fayol postulated that organizations need to create organizational stability. If they did not plan accordingly, the wrong people would get into essential roles, which could work against the goal of stability (Klein & Salk, 2013). Fayol's work in 1917, *Administration Industrielle et Générale,* outlined fourteen points regarding management, which stimulated early succession planning models (Richards, 2009). Their work was later translated into English in 1949 to *General and Industrial Management* and is still widely quoted (Voxted, 2017). Fayol was a proponent of a simple leadership model where there is only one head of an organization rather than planning for co-leadership for fear of creating an organization that acts like a monster with two heads (Krause, Priem, & Love, 2015). Keeping in mind that Fayol's goal was stability, it makes sense that they would advocate for a leadership model where employees only have one supervisor. But these were early days in the debate about succession planning where simplicity appeared to be the goal as early as the 1930s. Gulick and Urwick (1937, cited by Krause et al., 2015) strongly advocated for strict adherence to a single leader concept so that authority is simple and harmonized (Krause et al., 2015), for fear of organizations falling into confusion. Fast forward nearly a century later, Krause et al. (2015) noted that a contrasting shared leadership theory is still in the early stages of development, as our understanding of the complexities of leadership has matured. Perhaps because of these early calls for singular administration, much of the subsequent literature has

focused on the event of succession itself, rather than developing a variety of leaders at every level. With a singular leader approach, much power and influence are conferred on the Chief Executive Officer (CEO); therefore, researchers focused on this organizational head because of the CEO's effect on an organization.

**Initial paradigms, insights, and theories.**

During the 1960s and beyond, much of succession related research was modernist in tone - that is, less reliant on tradition (Ross & Lindgren, 2015) and more focused on contemporary thought and solutions - and, therefore, was conducted within a positivist lens grounded in an ontological view where reality adheres to immovable laws or rules (Aliyu, Bello, Kasim, & Martin, 2014). Moses and Knutsen (2017) explain that positivists or naturalists depend on examination and experience. References to Grusky's work have dominated the literature since the 1960s. However, upon an exploration of their work, one can see extremes in their research with their approaches and biases. Grusky's work dispensed with a reliance on tradition, which led to new, and, in present-day thought, somewhat questionable research. Relying on data collection where they could observe and experience with a naturalist lens, they simulated a prison camp to study succession, referred to arson outbreaks during a company's succession events, and also reminded readers that all are mortal (Grusky, 1960) so that succession is inevitable whether planned or not. As a current-day female higher education leader and practitioner-researcher, I note their view of succession was male-centric, with a lack of generalizability given the small size of their sample case studies, and sometimes contrived situations. Their research work appears to have been heavily influenced by recent world wars and the male-dominated realm of leadership. Their work is noted to be in line with a positivist epistemology where they used logic

based on what they experienced. As foundational as their work was to succession research, I am aware of how the environment can prejudice even the most influential of researchers despite an aim of empiricism - something for me to consider as I move ahead with this study. Regardless, several researchers subscribed to Grusky's theory that leaders matter, including Guest (1962) to Giambatista et al. (2005) in the 2000s demonstrating that Grusky influenced future research and practice.

Similar to the early approaches, research appeared to view leadership somewhat dichotomously in that leaders are impactful on organizations in the vein of Fayol (cited by Klein & Salk, 2013) and Grusky (1960, 1961, 1963), or leaders' impact is negligible as suggested by Gamson and Scotch (1964). Not surprisingly, these dichotomous views were supported with persistent positivist studies such as Brown's (1982) study, which conducted longitudinal regression analysis with minimal acknowledgement that there could be variations from these two views.

Grusky (1960, 1961, 1963) and Gamson and Scotch (1964) are examples of not only succession research's initial paradigm of positivism but also attempts to obtain easily accessible and concrete data such as baseball team quantitative statistics (Friedman and Singh, 1989). Although the aim was to analyze organizations of similar size (and gender) like baseball teams of the day where team members were likely to look and act in similar ways to identify themes or trends, early positivist research did have limitations in that it perpetuated male-centric and simplistic research analyses of the succession event by putting the complexity of organizations aside, which in the present day of globalization and shared leadership can be limiting. Moreover, early research continued to focus on the act of succession itself, adding an additional element of

simplicity to the investigation. As the literature matured there were attempts to add complexity to the positivist succession research such as Brown (1982) who studied football teams, due to their larger rosters and the coach making more strategic decisions than baseball teams, by comparing team performance and succession processes using regression analysis. Friedman and Singh (1989) conducted a study to suggest that there are different precursors to the succession event, thereby introducing organizational context. The 1980s literature was finally confirming the move away from sports team analyses to primary corporate data where Friedman and Singh (1989) surveyed 235 Fortune 500 firms about the reasons behind their change in CEO and comparing those to stock market reactions.

### *Adaptive versus inertial.*

Another example of the dichotomous perspective is the contrast between the theories of adaptive and inertial organizations. The work of Grusky (1960, 1961, 1963) and Friedman and Singh (1989) are examples of the adaptive view of organizations where the literature concluded that organizations respond adaptively to their environment with executive selection (Cannella & Lubatkin, 1993). Cannella and Lubatkin (1993) continued with a positivist approach by using more sophisticated logistic regression analysis than seen before in the literature using data from the *Wall Street Journal* to model the outcomes of succession. With an adaptive perspective, Cannella and Lubatkin (1993) cited other studies that concluded organizational outsiders are chosen to lead if organizational performance is poor.

Conversely, if organizations experience good performance, then there is no desire to 'upset the boat' and insiders are chosen as successors (Grusky, 1961). However, as rationally as the

adaptive perspective appears to explain outsider selection, research has not provided empirical evidence to support this theory (Dalton & Kesner, 1985; Friedman & Singh, 1989; Furtado & Karan, 1990). The insider versus outsider debate is a large component of succession literature, which further highlights the limiting lenses sometimes used. It is also useful to juxtapose the adaptive viewpoint with the inertial where proponents argue that leader selection is mostly *not* adaptive because so many people are involved in the decision process, and resistance to change is upheld in order for people's agendas to be followed (Cannella & Lubatkin, 1993). According to Cannella and Lubatkin (1993), there is a lack of evidence to support the adaptive view regarding outsider selection, but the inertial perspective has also been suggested to lack prognostic validity (Cannella & Lubatkin, 1993).

There is a lack of symmetry in the literature between evidence and theory flowing out of this dichotomous debate over 30 years regarding selection. Literature indicated there are several possible factors that could influence the relationship between organizational performance and leader selection decisions (Cannella & Lubatkin, 1993). However, some agree that even after the multi-decades' debate, we still do not know much about executive succession and the resulting organizational impact (Ballinger & Schoorman, 2007; Berns & Klarner, 2017; Datta & Rajagopalan, 1998; Kesner & Sebora, 1994). Therefore, the positivist approach, while foundational, does not appear to have served the succession literature fulsomely, and this paper is justified to move away from the earlier positivist research to the more productive and recent literature.

**Let the Complexity Ensue**

After the early research of the 1960s, complexity was added with more variables considered as Kesner and Sebora (1994) found in their extensive succession literature review. However, the focus of research continued to be on the act of succession and its after-effects. Giambatista et al. (2005), in their second extensive literature review a decade after Kesner and Sebora (1994), found increased attention during the 1980s and early 1990s to gain empirical results and improve methodologies to measure organizational performance. But still, Giambatista et al. (2005) maintained that the succession theory literature was disjointed and inconsistent, and few studies used the same theoretical viewpoints. A review at the beginning of this chapter of the variety of metaphors used to explain succession planning appears to support this view of fragmentation. Giambatista et al. (2005) further suggested that after all the years of inquiry and research, with varying degrees of success and consistency, perhaps we should not aim to adopt a predominant theoretical framework. It is as though they suggest we agree to disagree because merely the succession event is complex and nuanced, never mind other topics surrounding succession.

Succession research has expanded beyond merely considering the event of succession into subsets of research covering topics such as succession planning and leadership development. While this literature maturation is welcome, there continues to be attempts to oversimplify the issue by using a positivist perspective with the majority of research conducted quantitatively regarding succession and its related topics. Johns (2006) suggested in their essay assessment of employee turnover and selection research that when conducting organizational research, there needs to be a concern for context. It is to this call for contextualization I will investigate HE succession planning in a rural setting, aligning with Aliyu et al.'s (2014) suggestion that social

sciences research is multi-layered. Investigating succession planning in various contexts is emerging in the literature, particularly in the nursing (Titzer, Shirey, & Hauck, 2014) and library sectors (Galbraith, Smith, & Walker, 2012).To add texture to this thesis study, I will use a different methodology from the prevailing quantitative studies to respond to previous positivist research's lack of depth. Methodologies will be utilized to understand more deeply how context influences human response to address the already acknowledged lack of succession planning research within an HE setting. I will expand on methodologies further in Chapter 3. As our understanding deepens about how the micro- and meso- levels interpret environmental drivers, the more we can evolve beyond attempting to uncover patterns and rather adopt a more nuanced interpretivist approach, which is more subjective, dialectical, and allows for realities to be constructed or interpreted (Aliyu et al., 2014) individually and organizationally.

In view of the call for context and texture to be considered in organizational research, an informed decision to frame this research project around an interpretivist ontology, and in preparation of analyzing this paper's findings using an "informed grounded theory" (Thornberg, 2012, p. 249) – to be further discussed in Chapter 3 – I will now outline a number of theories, which may inform further data analysis.

**Law of requisite variety.**

The following examples of organizational theory support Moses and Knutsen's (2017) call for the use of diverse methodologies, and further support the earlier mentioned (in Chapter 1) postmodernist Ashby's law of requisite variety, which argues that a system needs to respond to many possible outcomes (Ashby & Goldstein, 2011) in order to be viable (Poulis & Poulis, 2016). Ashby proposed their law in the mid-20$^{th}$ century as a way to intersect cybernetics (the

study of processing and responding to information in living and non-living systems (Novikov, 2016)) and biology (Poulis & Poulis, 2016). And while the law does not necessarily come from organizational management, it can apply to this realm of research. Ashby (Ashby & Goldstein, 2011) described our world as operating within a spectrum that ranged from predictable or constrained to limitless or, as Boisot and McKelvey (2007) re-characterized it - working within three systems or behaviours: "ordered…complex…chaotic" (p. 3). Boisot and McKelvey (2010), in their theoretical essay, attempted to marry complexity science and the law of requisite variety perspectives on organizations. They asserted that modernists were looking for order to explain their world.

Similarly, one could say that in the early years, succession researchers were seeking order in the event of succession. However, as the body of literature grew, succession and leadership researchers recognized there is a richness and intricacy in organizations. Therefore, a postmodernist approach where modern thinking is often questioned (James, 2008), in keeping with Boisot and McKelvey's (2010, 2011) call for postmodernism in organizational research and adaptability, started to make room for non-positivist ontologies and epistemologies. With the plethora of succession metaphors, as well as recognizing succession literature's fragmentation, Ashby's law of requisite variety has the potential to offer a valuable lens for succession literature, as Boisot and McKelvey (2010) argue "emergent complexity is a function of the variety present" (p. 420). Therefore, it is expected a variety of theoretical frameworks may be used to understand the data for this study, and a variety of proposed solutions may emerge from interview participants as they look to address their specific needs and affinities. Nonaka (1994) suggested it

is this variety that helps organizations maximize their efficiency. That is, we should celebrate and capitalize on our differences.

Alternatively, Poulis and Poulis (2016) challenged whether Ashby's law of requisite variety should be applied as much as it has in organizational management research, and even suggested that it had been "taken for granted" (p. 504) by management literature without supporting empirical evidence. Ashby's law may inform this research but I do not intend to use Ashby's law as its sole theoretical framework, partly in response to Poulis and Poulis' (2016) call to acknowledge complexity in organizations and human agency.

**Upper echelons theory.**

Hambrick and Mason's (1984) theoretical proposition of the upper echelons theory continues to influence management literature. Carpenter, Geletkanycz, and Sanders' (2004) literature review of Hambrick and Mason's (1984) theory found the upper echelons theory was cited at least 500 times during the 30 years after publication. The upper echelons view aligns with Fayol and Grusky (1960), who concluded leaders do, indeed, impact their organizations (Carpenter et al., 2004). And, although, Hambrick and Mason (1984) did not write to address succession per se, there are some cogent aspects in their work to this thesis topic. Organizational outcomes can reflect, in part, the firm's top managers or upper echelons (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), not just the CEO. Therefore, it behooves organizations to pay attention to various leadership groups in organizations on a number of issues, including succession planning, to better control organizational outcomes. Upper echelons theory, according to Hambrick (2007), is built on the concept that we cannot objectively understand complex scenarios, but we can interpret

them. Therefore, upper echelons theory promotes alignment with an interpretivist research paradigm and continues to influence organizational research to the present day.

An implication of upper echelons theory is that where leaders impact their organizations, organizations should invest in their leaders for strategic optimization. One way to invest in these leaders is to expose them to a variety of disciplines and functions (Geletkanycz & Black, 2001). This call for heterogeneity in leadership development brings us back to the potency of Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety, even when applied to the development of leaders by applying multiple strategies to a situation. Therefore, it follows that by exposing leaders to various tactics, sustainable optimization is more achievable.

As far back as 1986, Friedman found that time spent by CEOS on succession seemed to be linked to positive outcomes for succession, which suggests that if any succession processes are to be put in place in organizations, there needs to be time spent on the initiatives from the upper echelons. Additionally, Hambrick and Mason (1984) were careful to emphasize that their unit of analysis was the top management team; focusing on the CEO and their characteristics is not enough. Companies need to consider the values and features of the entire team to ensure optimization. Similarly, this same team approach is arguably important when developing leaders and planning for succession rather than building development plans for individuals in isolation to what the rest of the top management team may have to offer. Abatecola and Cristofaro (2018), in their historical discussion of upper echelons theory, noted criticisms of Hambrick and Mason's (1984) original work, such as questioning the equal weighting given to elements of managerial discretion, how they defined executives' job demands and focusing too much emphasis on CEOs.

Accordingly, this thesis project will not limit its focus on just the CEO, rather a range of leadership positions, ranging from Chair to President.

Carpenter et al.'s (2004) prediction that upper echelons theory would be used as a theoretical framework for years to come because of its generalizability is realized in Lee's (2018) conceptual paper on top manager's attitudes regarding the value of diversity. Lee (2018) recommended integrating upper echelons theory with other theories such as signalling theory (concerned with improving informational balance amongst parties) when aiming to increase diversity in sport. Upper echelons' team versus individual approach influences a variety of current day research in increasingly nuanced and varied areas of management like restaurant franchising (Lee, Choi, & Moon, 2018), innovation and research (Garms & Engelen, 2019), and board decision-making processes (Kanadli, Bankewitz, & Zhang, 2018). Interestingly, all the previously mentioned research examples stayed within a quantitative methodology using such data as financial information from publicly traded databases, corporate annual reports and board of director surveys.

Upper echelons theory still has a place in literature and has a role in the theoretical framework underpinning this research project. Additionally, the theory has been applied in an increasingly wide range of current literature settings across several countries. Using it in Canada could provide useful insights and integrating it in a non-positivist methodology could help further the theory's utility.

**Human/social/cultural capital.**

Nobel-award winning economist Gary Becker wrote their seminal book in the 1960s regarding human capital theory, which focuses on all individuals (rather than upper echelons' focus on top management teams) and attempts to explain the relationship between individual characteristics and organizational benefit (Becker, 1993). Since then, theorists have built on Becker's work, including their categorization of people's skills as broad, customized to industry, and specific to a firm (Mooney, Semadeni, & Kesner, 2017). Applying this framework to an organization's leadership development and succession planning processes could also be of use. Becker (1993) argued people choose whether or not they want to develop and invest in themselves. There is an interplay between individual and organizational aims and, while a person's values could inform whether they choose to develop their skills, human capital theorists do not consider employees' internal values as upper echelons' theorists might. However, human capital theory aligns with the resource-based theory (discussed later in this chapter), where organizations focus on their internal resources in the context of employees. As an example of the interplay, Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, and Graf (1999) cited numerous studies showing the investment of education in an individual is positively related to career advancement, salary increases, and opportunities to be promoted. Accordingly, a firm's human resource system and its human capital should be continuously assessed for strategic fit (Collins & Kehoe, 2017; Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001).

Bourdieu (1986) expanded on the idea of human capital to introduce additional forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Economic capital can immediately be converted into money and may come in the form of rights to property. Social capital arises from social

connections which can be converted into economic capital. Possibly due to criticisms of Becker's theories (such as they do not provide sufficient explanation of concepts) social capital theory takes the concept of human capital and essentially allows for the web of connections and personal interactions to be drawn or considered around each individual, as per Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, and McKee's (2014) review of leadership development literature. While perhaps not as linear as human capital, it still has value, as noted by Oldroyd and Morris (2012), who cited research theorizing relationship networks are valuable resources. Subject to an individual's stage of development, the intensity of one's social capital depends on their ability to utilize various contacts and relationships, modes of assimilating, and identifying skills (Oldroyd & Morris, 2012). Accordingly, social capital theory attempts to suggest why certain people advance and others do not, thereby going beyond Becker's (1993) mechanical and economic analysis of human capital. Possessing capital, in whichever form, that looks or behaves like those who are hiring or promoting can increase the likelihood of advancing. While some may not want to monetize employees via the human capital theory, perhaps the extension of human capital to social capital theory is applicable to the HE sector because of the values of shared governance and collaboration, where relationships are significant and valued.

Bourdieu's (1986) third form of capital was cultural capital, which, like social capital, can be converted into economic capital. Bourdieu expanded that cultural capital may exist in a number of states: "embodied" (p. 243), found in individual temperament that is not converted or developed immediately, "objectified" (p. 243) in cultural artifacts like books, and "institutionalized" (p. 243) or established in such a thing as educational attainment. Bourdieu (1986) argued one could acquire, albeit unconsciously, cultural capital depending on the period,

society, and social class in which they find themselves. For this paper, the most relevant of these states may be institutionalized and embodied cultural capital, particularly in the context of Canada - a diverse country made up of First Nations and a myriad of settler immigrants. How one builds social capital may be influenced by the type and amount of cultural capital one has (Bourdieu, 1986), and this may be difficult to navigate in a diverse country, and in diverse organizations such as post-secondary.

Regardless, whether one opts to call employees and their inter- and intra-organizational relationships and interactions as human and social capital or not, the goal should be to invest in one's employees for organizational optimization.

**Resource dependence theory/resource-based theory.**

Resource dependence theory, according to Hillman, Withers, and Collins' (2009) review, theorizes that managers attempt to manage external dependencies so as to limit environmental insecurity, while still accepting that organizations operate in an open and interdependent environment. Extrapolated to succession, particular conditions will dictate the kind of executive or leader that is hired rather than upper echelons' stance that organizational strategy is a result of top management's experiences (Guthrie & Datta, 1997). That is, under resource dependence theory, candidates' experiences are a main consideration for those selecting executives; which experiences are desired depends on what organizations sense they need to minimize uncertainty within their particular environment. Resource-dependence theorists advocate for outsiders to replace top managers to remedy poor organizational performance (Karaevli, 2007). Similar to upper echelons theory's global literature permeation, resource dependence theory is also

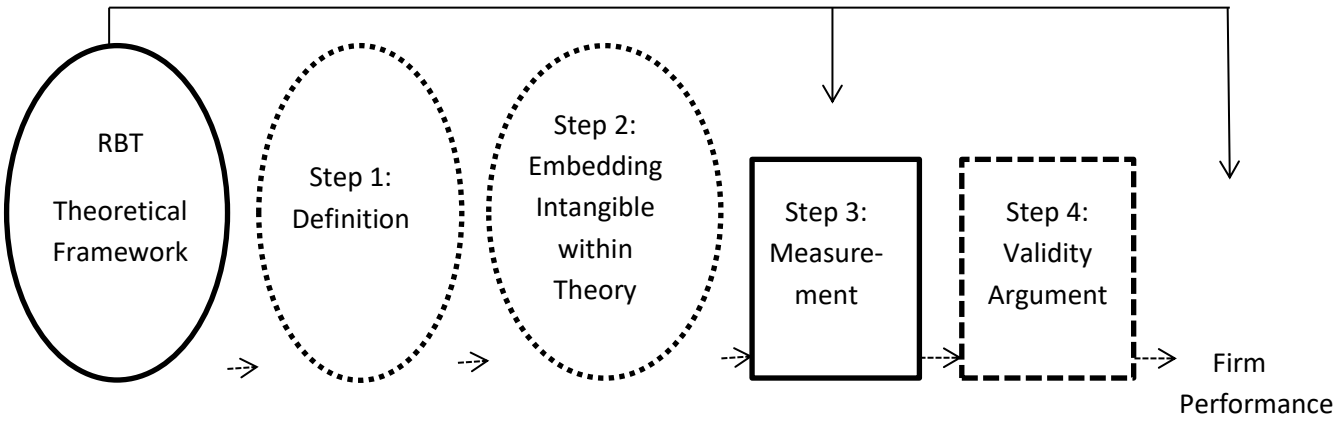
influencing global research, as seen in Kholmuminov, Kholmuminov, and Wright's (2019) quantitative analysis of higher education's reliance on tuition fees in Uzbekistan. Going beyond financial resources, Busenbark, Krause, Boivie, and Graffin (2016) highlighted in their synthesis of management literature that resource dependence is a theory applicable to all managers and could have a place in this paper as I intend to interview a variety of management levels as Canadian HE aspires to maintain relevancy in an increasingly globalized sector. As institutions attempt to manage their external environments, they will need to balance the hiring of externals for their particular experiences with grooming its existing personnel.

The resource-based theory started to take shape in the 1980s, where organizations began to assess their internal resources, not just external, and was seen to be one of the most potent theories to describe and explain organizational interrelations (Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2011). As it evolved, resource-based theory started to consider organizations' human capital and, where managed properly, could set organizations apart (Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregerson, 2001). If we subscribe to the upper echelons theory that managers' backgrounds can impact organizations, and then marry that with the resource-based theory, competitive advantage can be built by managing and developing internal resources well, this can then further the argument that succession planning is worth an organization's time (Kor, 2003) for organizational sustainability (Carpenter et al., 2001). Molloy, Chadwick, Ployhart, and Golden (2011) acknowledged the intangible nature of some resources and ensuing difficulty in measuring these. Accordingly, based on their statistical review of 637 articles, Molloy et al. (2011) advocated for a multidisciplinary approach of integrating resource-based theory with other theoretical frameworks where both macro- and micro- forces are considered when testing theory. They encouraged adding qualitative analysis

with resource-based theory in research through their explanation of the Multidisciplinary Assessment Process (MAP) model. See Figure 2.1.

***Figure 2.1: Multidisciplinary assessment process (MAP) for resource-based theory (RBT) tests***

**Theory of the Intangible**




Legend:

Constructs and theories

More concrete elements of construct validation, such as measures

---------- Considerations researchers often neglect

——— Considerations to which researchers often attend

- Adapted from Molloy et al. (2011, p. 1508).

Although Molloy et al.'s (2011) MAP model will not be strictly adhered to in this thesis project because of its strong emphasis on resource-based theory (which is not anticipated to be the dominant theory in this paper), their model makes a useful contribution to the concept of

interplaying resource-based theory with other theoretical frameworks when discussing such intangible assets as human capital, providing theoretical guidance to apply Ashby's law of requisite variety and other frameworks such as those described earlier in this chapter.

## Just Part of the Mix

Research over the years has tried to explain the organizational outcomes of the finite succession event - just one part of the picture. A related area of research focusing on leadership theory has also been growing for over a century (Avolio, Reichard, Hannah, Walumbwa, & Chan, 2009), which, when combined with succession literature builds to appeal for more understanding on how to plan for succession. Kesner and Sebora (1994) outlined the third phase of research, which started in the 1980s and called for succession planning. The body of research for both succession and leadership development continues to build and expand (Day et al., 2014) as we prepare to fill the pipeline.

### Succession planning versus leadership development.

Richards (2009) noted there was some confusion amongst HE practitioners regarding what succession planning is versus leadership development, concurring with Kesner and Sebora's (1994) conclusion in their exhaustive succession literature review that there is a blurred understanding of the concept of succession overall amongst researchers. Kesner and Sebora (1994) suggested this is due, in part, to the variety of lenses being used to conduct research, which includes:

- sociologists who are most interested in learning about how organizations adapt to their external environments using a transference of power at the organizational level;
- organizational behaviourists who are more concerned with the stages of succession, how to manage them, and how people deal with succession at the individual level; and
- strategy researchers who are more occupied with succession as a way to optimize internal resources for competitive gain.

In Kesner and Sebora's (1994) view, these differing perspectives could be a contributing factor in the lack of consistency in research findings. According to my review of the literature subsequent to Kesner and Sebora's (1994) work, the use of multiple lenses does not appear to be assuaging the inconsistent findings. Indeed, the inconsistent findings Kesner and Sebora (1994) found over 25 years ago persist and the practice of leadership development is also generally not working and needs a "structural shift" (Bohinc, Reams, & Claydon, 2020, p. 49). Despite investment in the leadership development industry, in the realm of billions, more than 50% of corporate senior leaders are dissatisfied with their development practices because of: differing motivations between the organization and individuals engaged in development, a gap in the skills organizations need versus those which individuals develop, and the lack of skills acquired from the training transferring to the workplace (Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). There is a telling growth of research that explores toxic leadership that is centred around the leader's self (Abbas & Saad, 2020) which, perhaps, is associated with the gaps in leadership development practice. Bell (2017) found in their quantitative study that leaders' self-promotion negatively impacts followers' levels of engagement and suggested that upper echelon leaders should be on the lookout for this when advancing individuals to leadership positions.

Capuano, Sebastian, Vose, and Hitchings (2008) suggested the term “leadership architecture” (p. 10) to include both concepts of leadership development and succession planning. The foundation of this cyclical architecture would be leader selection, which needs to be based on particular desired competencies, with the culmination being succession planning. Inversely, Virick and Greer (2012) see succession planning as the foundation for developing leaders. Conger and Fulmer (2003) identified succession planning as a vehicle for the development of leadership pools for various levels of the organization. Titzer et al. (2014) describe succession planning as a “strategic process to identify, develop, and evaluate intellectual capital, which can, in turn, ensure organizational leadership continuity” (p. 38). The literature discussed thus far demonstrates that succession planning and leadership development are intertwined, yet there is a need to differentiate the two.

While succession planning and leadership development are related, it seems possible based on a review of the literature that without intentional opportunities for individual leadership development, there is no effective succession planning process. Leadership development could operate on its own with no clear direction for individuals to work towards specific positions within an organization, and it could just be for the benefit of the individual. However, succession planning provides a framework and organizational goals within which a corresponding leadership development program could operate. Like the idea that without people, there would be no corporation or higher educational institution, similarly, there would be no effective succession planning process to meet organizational strategic goals without the opportunity for individuals to develop themselves. Not all succession must be done with internal employees, but developing one's employees is an integral part of succession planning. For leadership development to be

authentic, there needs to be ongoing processes where people can build self-awareness and frank relationships to discuss both individual and organizational plans that develop organizational human capital and individuals' social capital (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

**Status of Succession Planning Research in Higher Education**

The small number of studies I uncovered regarding succession planning in education and higher education came to some common conclusions. In Australia, Thompson (2010) reported the results of their mixed-methods study of assistant principals where they recommended that succession planning be strategic at both systemic and school levels to develop potential leaders. Although the focus of this study was on education and not higher education, results outlining possible development strategies are generalizable to higher education, if not beyond. One of the suggested questions to be researched further was whether a leadership pipeline should be established in education.

Richards (2009), using a grounded theory approach, concluded, after interviewing executives at six American institutions, that the communication of the succession plan is vital for managers to find value in the process of succession planning, but the plan also needs to "honor the collegial culture of cooperation and inclusion" (p. 92) in light of the distinctive governance and cultures found in higher education. One participant in Richards' (2009) study suggested avoiding the term succession plan completely, instead focussing on the plan as one for individuals to develop their skills. Of the six institutions Richards (2009) investigated, only one appeared to have a formal policy for succession planning, although all institutions had succession planning practices. Based on their findings, they concluded that the two most important

considerations regarding succession planning were institutional culture and communication. It will be interesting to see if similar conclusions are drawn from this research project as it will be conducted in a different country and settings.

The only two studies uncovered of succession planning in Canadian HE were conducted in 1998 (Cembrowski & da Costa) and 2013 (Morrin), so the time is ripe for another study in Canada. Cembrowski and da Costa (1998) conducted a naturalistic inquiry using semi-structured interviews of people at varying stages of their careers in a technical institute. This study found that managers were not provided with training or guidance on how to progress their careers. The researchers admitted there was narrow generalizability from their study because of their use of a purposeful selection of participants. However, they did suggest their study had the potential to be transferable to other institutions. They called for more exploration, both qualitatively and quantitatively, of career development in higher education. In a similar limited setting, Morrin (2013), used a sequential mixed-methods case study and explored the factors which are important for succession planning at an institution in Central Canada, such as aligning succession planning systems with institutional goals on a broad basis. The researcher used public documents, quantitative surveys, and semi-structured interviews to form part of their methodology.

**Gap in Literature**

As evidenced above, research regarding the act of succession and planning for succession has been building throughout the last 60 years. And while there was originally some focus on sports teams, the focus for succession research has been expanding. Giambatista et al. (2005) concluded in their review of succession and leadership literature since 1994 that there is value in

investigating succession across a variety of industries. They also encouraged researchers to move away from larger organizations such as Fortune 500 companies and be more inclusive and investigate small to mid-size organizations because of the potential for greater effect in smaller systems. Furthermore, Montlha Pila et al. (2016) suggested in their quantitative, survey-based research of a regional South African government that the public sector has not been considered in succession literature. Aside from changing the setting, Giambatista et al. (2005) also encouraged the use of methods such as surveys, interviews and experiments to diversify the body of knowledge away from archival data, echoing Kesner and Sebora's (1994) call ten years prior. This thesis project responds to these calls for research on smaller organizations in public sector settings, while using surveys and interviews to help fill the research gap.

I also have noted through my literature review that the predominant methodologies have been quantitative with more of a positivist perspective, agreeing with Kesner and Sebora (1994) and Giambatista et al. (2005). As discussed above, the process of managing an organization's internal resources can be a complicated matter; therefore, it follows that this project moves away from positivism to an interpretivist perspective to allow for a variety of contingencies. To my knowledge, I am aware of one other study which took a grounded theory approach to succession planning in higher education and that was by Richards (2009) ten years ago, set in the United States. In positivist fashion, there has been a large focus on the succession event rather than the process and also agreed upon by Berns and Klarner (2017) in their comprehensive review of CEO succession literature. This project again seeks to move away from the act of succession and its organizational outcomes, to the process of succession, in a similar approach as Richards (2009) using interviews of HE managers.

While Day et al. (2014), after reviewing 25 years of leadership literature, called for longitudinal research regarding leadership development, which would be outside the scope of this thesis project, they also called for the consideration of multiple factors and varied approaches in analyses. Therefore, by attempting to use a mixed-methods approach, including the interviewing of people at varying stages of career progression, this project will endeavour to fill part of the gap in the literature which Day et al. (2014) observed and recommended that the intra- and inter-personal interactions of leadership development can be explored through semi-structured interviews.

Literature specific to succession planning in HE is severely limited as outlined earlier; a conclusion with which Klein and Salk (2013) agree in their qualitative study of private higher education presidential succession in the United States. Succession planning has been an important part of corporate America for a long time (American Council on Education, 2006; Morrin, 2013), but has only recently been considered by academia and most research on the topic in HE has been done in the United States (Morrin, 2013). At this point, I am not aware of any studies informed by a rural context in any country. American research can inform succession planning in HE in other countries, but because the topic is nuanced and can be impacted by culture and communication (Morrin, 2013), it is important to expand the reach of the literature with a goal of greater transferability and generalizability.

Correspondingly, I propose my project will fill the lacuna of succession planning research in HE and in Canada, with expanded context and using a differing methodology than has been predominantly used by others, as will be outlined in the next chapter.

**Concluding Summary of Literature and How it Relates to Research Questions**

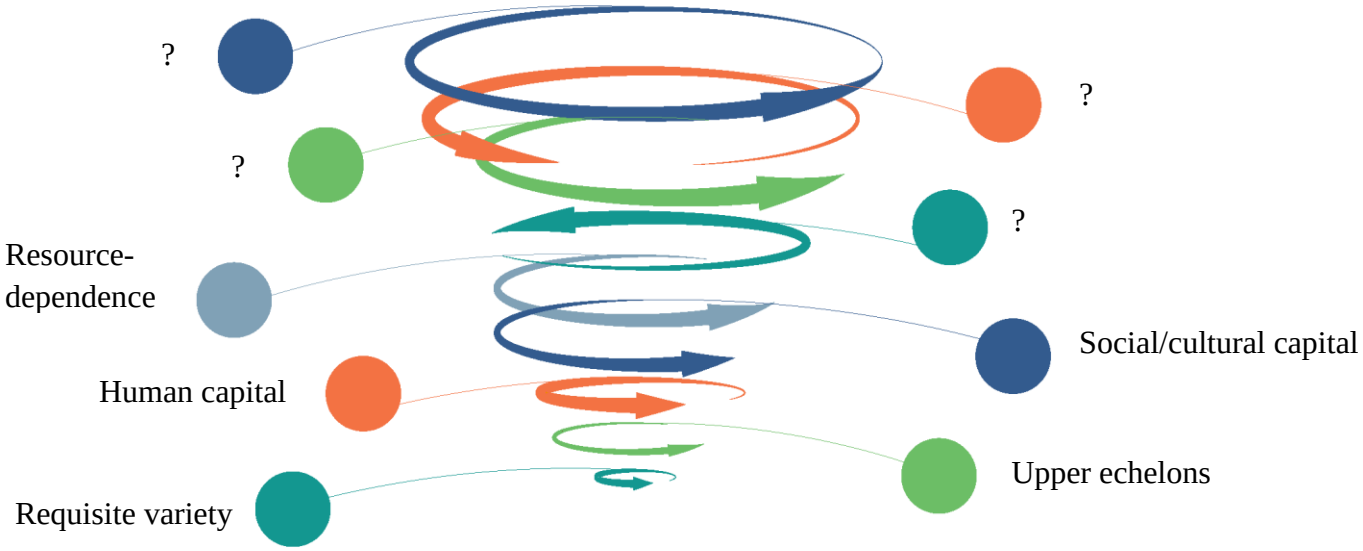
This chapter has provided a brief historical look at succession literature as it evolved from a naturalist perspective with an emphasis on quantitative methods towards allowing for a broadened interpretivist ontological, postmodern approach and increasing diversity in methods. This expansion provides an opportunity for this paper to respond to seeming gaps in the literature with more focused contextualization on succession planning and leadership development in Canadian HE, while also adding to the literature by proposing to intertwine quantitative and qualitative methods.

Acknowledging that leaders in Canadian HE come from a variety of backgrounds and have varied lived experiences, I am bolstered to apply Ashby's law of requisite variety wherein Canadian HE may need to be ready to respond to a variety of outcomes. Focusing on Canadian HE leaders' lived experiences in my research questions (discussed further in Chapter 3), while gleaning what the participants would recommend as future actions, aligns with the direction in which social sciences, in general, and specifically management literature appear to be moving.

This chapter has explored a variety of theories to inform further data analysis, and the formation of an emergent model. I view all of the above theories discussed, as swirling around one another in no particular order – all able to expand or elaborate on the topic of succession planning and leadership development. Perhaps a better visual depiction is that of a spiral that expands as it grows upwards, becoming more applicable to more scenarios as it grows – drawing from each theory as it expands. As depicted in Figure 2.2, the various theories discussed in this chapter may apply in various scenarios and organizations as they develop and expand their

succession planning and leadership development practices. It should be noted that the theories discussed in this chapter are not intended as an exhaustive list of theories to inform succession planning. Indeed, as this paper's research evolves, other theories not yet discussed may also be found to apply. The various bubbles represent not only the theories discussed in Chapter 2, but allows for an expanding number of theories to inform both practice and research as a theoretical framework similar to, albeit not as linear, Molloy et al.'s (2011) multidisciplinary approach where multiple theories can be integrated when various forces are at play.

***Figure 2.2: Spiralling theoretical framework***




In response to this chapter's initial literature review and in view of my main research question where I explore how the lived experiences of HE administrators could provide insight to improve succession planning practices, I propose a theoretical framework that is underpinned by

Ashby's law of requisite variety where we make room not only for multiple strategies in succession planning depending on the context in which an administrator operates, but also room for multiple theories in addressing the topic. Adding to the anticipated mix of theories, I plan to draw on upper echelons theory as I consider how leaders might impact their organizations, human capital theory as I ponder how individuals also impact the organization, social and cultural capital as I contemplate how people interact with each other in organizations. To a lesser extent I expect resource-dependence theory may also form part of the theoretical framework, as this paper will focus on the internal work that an organization might undertake rather than external hiring (although, external hiring is a valid and important piece of the succession planning puzzle). The theoretical framework as depicted in Figure 2.2 also allows the consideration other theories to inform further succession planning practice.

# Chapter 3:

# The Study

**Objective and Refined Research Question**

This research aims to inform future developments in succession planning in rural Canadian post-secondary institutions by learning about the succession planning experiences of those who are likely to be subjects and initiators of succession planning systems and ensuing leadership development. Based on an initial literature review of organizational management research from corporate settings and, to a much more limited extent, higher education settings, I am concerned the literature suggests it is getting harder to fill vacant positions in higher education. Based on my observations and conversations with colleagues within my province and country, this predicted lacuna of HE leaders appears to be materializing in Canadian post-secondary. With my aim in view and in response to a need for an extended investigation, I propose the following main research question and supporting questions:

1. How can the lived succession planning experiences of rural Canadian HE institutional administrators provide insights into how institutions might improve their succession planning practices?
    a. How do mid-to-senior leaders perceive the impact of their institution's (both past and present) succession planning on themselves individually, those lower in the hierarchy, and for the institution as a whole?
    b. What elements of their institutional succession planning have mid-to-senior leaders found most helpful, and why?
    c. How would mid-to-senior leaders like to see their institution's succession planning change and why?

**Ontological Perspective**

Before attempting to address the research questions outlined above, I needed to determine my ontological lens to address the questions, thereby informing the design and methodological approach to the research. Humans are complex creatures. Moses and Knutsen (2012) argued our ontological perspective could change depending on the desired outcomes, similar to how we can change the jacket we are wearing. There are different ways of knowing, depending on what we are contemplating. Currently, Canada is embarking down the road of reconciliation with its Indigenous peoples in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 calls to action (2015). In this Commission's report, the Education sector (amongst others) is called upon to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing into its practices and content. In essence, the report implies there are different ways of viewing our world, reflecting an ontological movement in Canada (and seen in other parts of the world, such as New Zealand's biculturalism movement (Williamson & Hedges, 2017) welcoming multiple ways of knowing or using different lenses. My research sits within a context that allows the use of different lenses depending on the research problem. In this chapter, I outline my ontological stance regarding succession planning, and my resulting epistemology and methodology.

Although Moses and Knutsen (2012) advocated wearing different ontological 'jackets,' they still categorized the research methodologies or ways we gain knowledge, as the naturalist and constructivist dichotomy. Creswell, Hanson, Clark, and Morales (2007) acknowledged there is an extensive list of paradigms at the qualitative researchers' disposal; therefore, Moses and Knutsen's (2012) suggested dichotomy is a simplistic model, which may serve more as two ends of a spectrum. Another term for naturalism is positivism (Moses & Knutsen, 2017), which was

used quite extensively in the organizational literature as the previous chapter outlines. Using a naturalist lens implies the use of logic and judgment with the goal of unveiling patterns which occur independent of the spectator, but also requires external data to provide credibility to the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Alternatively, Lincoln and Guba (2013) highlighted the belief that the observer/researcher has a key and equal role with participants. Perhaps Moses and Knutsen (2012) mused that some social researchers are hesitant to accept the naturalist point of view because of the belief that the complex swirl of social and environmental interactions can impact the observer. That is, we construct or interpret reality based on what and how we experience life – which is described in the ontological perspective of constructivism. Because of this room for interpretation, constructivists may use epistemological devices like "empathy, authority, myths" (Moses & Knutsen, 2012, p. 10) amongst others to build their way of knowing. Indeed, the reason for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada was because of the different cultures and lived experiences which influenced how settlers chose to treat Indigenous peoples. Now our country must come to terms with its past while still incorporating empathy.

Moses and Knutsen (2012) maintained the two primary ontological assumptions are positivist and constructivist. They also acknowledged that our questions should direct the research methods, not the other way around. In short, they called for social researchers to be prepared to wear a different jacket (Moses & Knutsen, 2012) or use a distinct toolbox (Moses & Knutsen, 2017) depending on the questions we want to answer. Although Moses and Knutsen (2017) adjusted their use of analogy from jacket to toolbox to explain methodology, I will, for this paper, focus on the fibrous, interwoven jacket.

**Which jacket?**

I aim to understand how administrators' motivations and interpretations of their experiences can inform future succession planning and leadership development practices and systems in a rural Canadian post-secondary context. Moses and Knutsen (2012) explained that social science's goal is to understand patterns, rather than forecast results. Similarly, this research did not attempt to predict what the conclusions would be, but learn from administrators' experiences and perceptions of effective and ineffective succession planning based on how the embedded experiences and interpersonal interactions impacted them. Supported by what I uncovered in the earlier literature review, Moses and Knutsen (2012) believed positivism is the hegemonic methodology in social sciences, where researchers seek coherent patterns. However, this might be disputed now as qualitative research grows in credibility, where some might say too much emphasis is placed on qualitative research. We may all observe and create different patterns depending on our perspective, and given the lack of qualitative methods in HE succession planning, adopting a non-positivist lens still seems to add value to the research.

I remember sitting on a colleague's patio in a small enclave in Switzerland some years ago, surrounded by mountains. Over dinner, the colleague told us an ancient story about two people who could not stop talking and eventually were turned into mountains. The outline of the mountain tops did indeed look like two people's facial profiles talking to one another. Before that dinner, all I observed were beautiful mountains from that patio. After hearing that story, my perspective changed, and now I could not 'unsee' the mountain lines drawing out faces talking to one another. My outlook had changed, or presuppositions according to Moses and Knutsen

(2012), and to this day, I continue to look at mountains to see if I can see other pictures drawn by the mountain skyline.

Similarly, I started down the road of leading an academic council because one person at a particular meeting nominated me for an executive position. I had never thought I could or would lead such a committee, but someone else had a different perspective, which helped contribute to increasing levels of leadership and position in my career. I have developed my leadership based not only on my beliefs and motivations but on how others work with me and perceive me. My leadership reality is socially constructed, where I try to understand my world, being open to a variety of views rather than trying to limit my understanding to a few ideas (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The range of perspectives, or "perspectivism" (Moses & Knutsen, 2012, p. 151), which we encounter (sometimes daily), poses a problem for those social scientists who prefer positivism and want to uncover the Truth. Succession planning can be influenced by corporate or institutional culture. How one broaches development conversations with one's supervisor can differ depending on the assumptions and observations both supervisor and supervisee bring with them into the meeting. Therefore, the ontological jacket that I will be wearing for this research project is that of social constructivism, with an openness to different perspectives that may complement one another. Similar to my two views of the mountain tops (pre- and post- ancient story told to me on the patio), neither perspective was wrong - merely different. I will attempt to employ a mixed-methods approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer Moses and Knutsen's (2012) call for pluralistic methodology in a postmodern world where we question the status quo (Stafford, 2015), but not pit constructivism and positivism against each other as though in a war (Shannon-Baker, 2016). Mixed-methods utilization is an attempt to

respect the positivist beginnings of organizational research by using the quantitative data to set the scene for the conversations I had with post-secondary administrators. Also, the resulting narrative adds expanded insight (Caruth, 2013) and adds elements of partnership on the spectrum of positivism and non-positivism (Aliyu et al., 2014). Furthermore, embracing methodological plurality bolsters social sciences and allows for more voices to be heard (Clarke, 2019), which also aligns with the idea of shared governance in post-secondary.

By linking positivism with constructivism, I argue reality can and does exist beyond myself as the researcher (Gray, 2018). However, with less emphasis on positivism and quantitative methods, I do not bind myself to use deductive reasoning in totality. I leave room for constructivism where people can find significance through their social experiences and relationships with one another and our world (Nunnelly, 2016). There are many changes taking place in higher education because of such factors as globalization and urbanization. Using social constructivism is justified in light of these changes because this perspective is receptive to change in context (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013). Using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, informed by social constructivism, can apprise the collection and analysis of data, while addressing the research questions (Caruth, 2013; Shannon-Baker, 2016). Indeed, Gorard (2017) argued keeping quantitative and qualitative methods separate is an unhelpful and binary approach. Instead, Gorard (2017) suggested using mixed-methods is a natural way to address research questions and allows researchers to work along a continuum of methods, rather than within a dichotomy. Furthermore, Muijs, Tolie, and McAteer (2011) observed that qualitative and mixed-methods have helped develop a more profound understanding of education's complex situation and are currently in vogue in educational research. I will use both methods, with a

primary emphasis on the qualitative data, underpinned with a social constructivist lens where I will not try to construct reality, rather construct understanding (Cottone, 2017) based on leaders' reflections and understanding of their experiences.

## Methodology

Now that I have framed the ontological and epistemological stances around the research questions, the next matter to address is which methodology to use based on these perspectives.

### Critical realism.

Stafford (2015) concluded critical realism is a paradigm that allows for constructivism and naturalism, and postmodernism, to co-exist. Shannon-Baker (2016) noted critical realism embraces a constructivist epistemology and responds to the dichotomous positioning of positivism and constructivism. Stafford (2015) suggested that by only subscribing to social constructivist epistemology, it is impossible to know reality. Therefore, they used a critical realist lens in their documentary analysis research to make connections between actualities and the observed. They identified with the view that scientific study can be both autonomous and co-existent with our beliefs (Benton, 2004), which provides for using qualitative and quantitative methods. However, as Bisman (2010) pointed out, critical realism aims to measure and authenticate any suggested causal relationships. Although I aim to emphasize administrators' perspectives and encourage their voices (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010), the research questions in this project are not necessarily attempting to uncover causality. A critical realist uses abductive reasoning by asking what may be true (Peirce, 1965, as cited in Walton, 2005) for the patterns observed in the data. Given the nature of my research questions where I am exploring the lived

experience of administrators to provide insight for future practice, my ontological lens seeks to use the past to inform the future, rather than entirely understand why the patterns occurred in administrators' lived experiences. Therefore, I opted not to use a critical realist methodology.

**Action research.**

Another methodology I considered was participatory action research. In this approach, a community of researchers takes action and creates knowledge about the work as it unfolds, encouraging equal participation from the community to transform an element of the community's situation or structure (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). I could utilize qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups, and even, perhaps, some quantitative data collection, which might uncover any movement in participants' perspectives prior to and after the intervention as part of the action research plan. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) proposed that action research involves questioning one's assumptions and may be helpful in contexts where the status quo is accepted. I could have focused on my institution where my colleagues and I would work together as co-researchers to investigate the problem (should there be one to find). Perhaps, incorporating a second-person approach where we question our assumptions, and also assess how a particular intervention impacts others, could have added depth to the project. From there, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) suggested the possibility of moving into a third-person level of action research where researchers attempt to link practice to theory, or perhaps create theory (Friedman & Rogers, 2009), in a similar outcome to grounded theory discussed later on. Of course, using third-person action research assumes it would have been possible to answer the research questions regarding the lived experience of managers. Answering the questions may have only been

possible if the group were able to identify a problem needing to be solved and could be addressed.

Notwithstanding the possible difficulty in being able to address the research question, I would have needed to recruit several people who are below me in my institution's hierarchy to achieve the cross-functional and cross-hierarchical depth I desired for action research. Given I am a Dean in my institution, with only four people higher than my level in the organization (three Vice-Presidents and a President) the ethical considerations to overcome would have been substantial. Balakrishnan and Cornforth (2013) recommended considering using a working agreement with the participant researchers to produce a safe place for those who are lower in the hierarchy. P. McIntosh (personal communication, February 14, 2018) proposed the use of a steering committee to help navigate the myriad of ethical concerns to achieve voluntary, ongoing, and informed consent. The suggested implementation of possibilities like working agreements and a steering committee to address the ethical concerns could help.

Participatory action research has not, to my knowledge, been conducted in a Canadian post-secondary setting so action research could offer a significant contribution to the literature. That said if I were to undertake action research, along with the suggested mechanisms to address ethical concerns, I likely would have been addressing a slightly different set of questions with a focus on my institutional managers' experiences and how we could learn from those to improve succession planning at our institution alone. With the possible challenge to overcome ethical concerns and the opportunity to contribute to the broader realm of knowledge, I decided against conducting action research. A pan-Canadian project seemed more impactful, with the most potential for generalizability, given that all Canadian research on succession planning in post-

secondary has focused on one institution at a time (Cembrowski & da Costa, 1998; Morrin, 2013). Therefore, I put action research aside. Because context is so crucial with a social constructivist lens, I am curious to see how institutional context will inform the themes that arise. However, future action research projects may surface as a result of this research as various institutions, upon reading this, may choose to initiate an action research project in their context to identify the applicability of the conclusions from this project.

### Grounded theory.

Another alternative framework is grounded theory, which is a series of inductive methods with a view toward the development of theory (Charmaz, 2004) and has been growing in use for qualitative education research (Thornberg, 2012). Grounded theory allows for specific strategies to address the analysis phase by streamlining and integrating data collection and analysis. However, the method can be misunderstood and is sometimes used in part only (Charmaz, 2004) and has, at times, been distorted (Glaser, 2016). Glaser (2016) reflected on grounded theory's beginnings, which Glaser and Strauss formulated in 1967 to bridge the gap between methods and theory. According to Glaser (2016), Glaser and Strauss aimed to develop concepts, which were pertinent to the participants, based on field data rather than use quantitative methodologies predominant at the time. However, Glaser (2016) felt they needed to continue writing even into the 2010s to try and explain, or example (Glaser used this as a verb) how to conduct grounded theory research. With their later work, Glaser (2016) aimed to clarify their grounded theory perspective, and build on and broaden the emergent aspects of grounded theory. Glaser (2016) strongly advocated for grounded theory in doctoral dissertations because of its ability to add original thought to literature.

Given the identified lacuna of research on succession planning in higher education, and more so in Canadian HE, and even more in rural contexts, grounded theory allows for original thought from those practicing in Canadian rural post-secondary.

### *Evolution of grounded theory.*

As applicable as grounded theory may be for this research project, there is a call under this methodology for a purely inductive approach where no pre-existing theories are considered (Thornberg, 2012). Thornberg (2012) noted by the early 2000s, there were at least three versions of grounded theory as Glaser and Strauss parted theoretical ways: Glaser, classic Strauss, and constructivist, the latter developed by Charmaz in the early 2000s. The classic grounded theory advocated for delaying the literature review so the researcher would not be influenced by past empirical research and, instead, make way for the new data collected to inform new theory. However, Thornberg (2012) argued that choosing to lay aside previous literature and thereby not benefit from those who have gone before us there is the risk that the educational community could reject any new contributions to the literature. Charmaz (2004) noted Glaser's version of grounded theory involved the researcher needing to be independent of reality, with the theory much more rooted in positivism. Thornberg (2012) did note, however, that Glaser, in later years, rejected the claim of positivist roots in their theory. Strauss' later iteration of grounded theory with Corbin advocated for more verification than the classic (Charmaz, 2004).

While grounded theory appears to have relevance in this research, because my ontological and epistemology lenses are more focused on constructivism, I opted to look more deeply at constructivist grounded theory as a possible theoretical framework. To substantiate looking

further than Glaser and Strauss' versions of grounded theory, Thornberg (2012) cited numerous authors who criticized the use of data collection and analysis without any reference to past theories because of the danger for researchers' biases and possible preconceptions to influence the study heavily.

Thornberg (2012) outlined the movement to abduction, as a go-between deduction and induction, where researchers would constantly move between data and previous knowledge. Previous work is not rejected but used to inspire new directions or ways of knowing. Thornberg further described constructivist grounded theory as "rooted in pragmatism and relativist epistemology" (2012, p. 248), where the researcher is assumed to construct the data and theory as a result of their exchanges with the participants and topic. There is also the assumption there are multiple perspectives of reality. Accordingly, Thornberg (2012) advocated for informed grounded theory, which would benefit from conducting a literature review before data collection and analysis, while still keeping its roots in constructivism and abduction, to sensitize the researcher to what has been uncovered before. Informed grounded theory involves moving away from a pure inductive grounded theory and, instead, acknowledges the researcher's potential embedded position within the research context and that data is socially constructed and may be built differently depending on who is constructing.

**Landing on the ground.**

As can be seen by this paper's order thus far, a literature review was conducted before data collection to ground me in the relevant literature, and to surround myself with research to help inform new thought or knowledge making its way to the surface. Therefore, I allowed my social

constructivist ontological and epistemological lenses to inform how to answer the research questions. While still respecting the research and knowledge created thus far, I utilized an informed grounded theoretical framework, which is flexible enough to conduct a literature review before data collection within the constructivist grounded theory. Using the informed grounded theoretical framework does mean, however, that if ideas and insights arise from the data which were not anticipated as a result of the literature review in Chapter 2, I will need, as a researcher, to explore literature further to inform my analysis and discussion.

**Possible Methods and Selection**

Based upon the ontological and epistemological perspectives outlined above and in line with a constructivist grounded theory methodology, I tried to utilize a QUAL+quan concurrent approach, to develop an understanding that may not have been possible if using one approach (Shannon-Baker, 2016). Additionally, using more than one method of data collection acknowledges Ashby's law of requisite variety (as discussed in chapter 2), which argues a system may need to respond in a variety of ways to the complexities it faces.

The use of the social constructivist lens in tandem with positivism to frame the findings was justified because I uncovered new knowledge through facilitating conversations about succession planning and people's shared experiences (Merriam, Cafarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Participants' viewpoints were relied upon for this research project (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and the majority of reliance for the research was placed on qualitative data to address the research questions. I collected quantitative data in an attempt to situate and contextualize where possible the qualitative findings through a deepened analysis (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) to understand

the topic's nuance better and provide for new and original thinking. However, the data from the survey was not needed to inform the interview protocol. The quantitative data was collected via questionnaires administered to human resource departments of eligible institutions where approval was granted.

I planned to conduct mixed-methods research in the form of semi-structured online, face-to-face video interviews (using Skype) of middle-to-senior level managers in rural post-secondary institutions across Canada, and administering a survey of the same institutions' human resource directors (or designates) with both quantitative and qualitative components. The use of mixed-methods research is growing in social science research (Hesse-Biber, 2015) and management research (Bryman, 2009). Accordingly, my desire to use mixed-methods in this research project was not misplaced as I hoped to provide a holistic analysis of succession planning to explore ways to address questions to gain useful insights and inform further development of succession planning practice in higher education.

The data collected helped provide a sense of the range of size of institutions which are defined as rural for this study, including such data points as the number of full-time equivalent students the institutions serve, and how many full-time equivalent faculty and staff are part of the institutional team. Also, the survey collected data to inform whether current leadership positions were sourced internally or externally from the institution, and whether the institutions have leadership development or succession planning practices in place for a variety of employee groups, and if so, what kinds of systems are in place. The survey participants were asked to identify how satisfactory they consider their institution's succession planning practices are. See Appendix E for detailed questions. By incorporating this survey data primarily through the use of

descriptive statistics focusing on percentages and frequency (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011), a backdrop was developed for the interview findings, with no linkages of the survey data to interview participants.

As mentioned earlier, the 'heart' of the research was addressed through collecting qualitative data using semi-structured interviews, to align with a social constructivist paradigm. I did consider using focus groups both in place of interviews, and to augment the semi-structured interview, as per Wilkinson's (2004) recommendation that focus groups can extend participants' perceptions and viewpoints. Participants sharing their experiences could prompt further discussions, perhaps about what they would like to see done differently in their institutions where other participants could learn and build understanding. The scope of this project was already large due to the number and geographical dispersion of the institutions being approached involving multiple (six) time zones. Therefore, I determined the logistics to co-ordinate numerous post-secondary leaders' schedules would be too difficult to overcome within the time limits of the thesis. Additionally, there was the possibility focus group participants might censor their remarks more than they might in individual interviews, and it would be a difficult task to afford confidentiality and anonymity. Therefore, I opted against using focus groups as a qualitative method alternative and chose to focus on the use of semi-structured interviews.

## Research Design

### Pilot and research protocols.

To ensure the research questions would be adequately addressed through the use of semi-structured interviews, I piloted the guiding interview questions with three colleagues from my

place of work. Because my institution was excluded from the population, I was able to access my colleagues. For the pilot interviews, I sent the guiding questions in advance of the interview as a reference for the pilot participants to read through so they could be aware of the range of topics to be discussed. The questions sent ahead were meant to be a guide and provide a truncated version of how the interview might go. I conducted and recorded each interview on Skype to practice with the technology. After each pilot interview, I asked for feedback on how the questions might be improved to facilitate quality dialogue. I also considered whether an hour-long time slot was enough to cover the interview questions, and while the length varied somewhat amongst pilots, an hour appeared sufficient. The interview questions were changed slightly, but not substantially as a result of the pilots. As I wrote and refined the interview questions, I aimed for them to allow for abductive research. Abductive reasoning allows for the researcher to use imagination when analyzing the data (Charmaz, 2014). Abduction also accepts the researcher will interact with the data and emergent analysis and emboldens the researcher to pay attention to the data that may not fit into previous explanations (Charmaz, 2014) and, as Reichertz (2007) describes, to extend knowledge through making inferences based on "profound insight" (p. 216). The open-ended nature of the questions, along with the semi-structured interview design, was intended to make room for lived experiences to be described and new or surprising data, which would be welcome with an abductive reasoning approach.

Therefore, upon discussion with the pilot participants and my primary thesis supervisor, and comparing the raw pilot data to the research questions, I determined the finalized guiding interview questions as follows:

1. Can you please give a brief overview of your career progression thus far?

2. What's your experience of getting promoted, promoting others, being part of the selection process in other departments in higher education?
3. If you think about some of the positions at your current institution, say at your level and above, that might be vacant in the next few years, how would you describe the plans for succession?
4. Tell me about what kinds of leadership development activities you have participated in over your career? Why did you participate in these activities? Which of these were most effective, and why?
5. Tell me about what kinds of leadership development you have done with your direct reports? Which did you find most helpful, and why?
6. How would you describe your institution's overall leadership development?
7. How does your institution identify promotable talent or high potential employees? How does your institution develop talent?
8. How would you describe how your institution's leadership development is linked with its succession planning practices?
9. How would you say your institution's characteristics or cultures influence the way it approaches succession planning?
10. How would you like your institution's succession planning to change, and why?

In addition, I drafted some possible follow-up questions for my use for those questions where I noted in the pilot that sometimes participants need some prompting. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to those three who participated in the pilot interviews and gave so willingly of their time.

I wanted to ensure the survey was understandable and clear, and have a more definite sense of how long it would take to answer the questionnaire. Therefore, I shared the draft survey via Survey Monkey with my primary thesis supervisor, three colleagues working in human resources from my institution, and a manager who works outside of higher education for feedback. There were minor edits suggested in both ordering and wording. I extend my gratitude to those who took the time to work through the survey. See Appendix E for detailed survey questions.

**Inclusion criteria and sample.**

I defined this project's population as any Canadian institution (university, college, institute, Cégep) that was a member of Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) as of my review of CICan's website in January 2019 and operated at least one centre or campus in a "small population centre" (Statistics Canada, 2017, para. 11) of up to 30,000 people, which is one of Statistics Canada's three categories along their "urban-rural continuum" (Statistics Canada, 2017, para. 11). There were 131 CICan members at the time of review, and based on my review of each member's website, 28 operated in rural centres only as defined earlier. An additional 48 operated in a mix of rural/non-rural centres. Therefore, the population was 76. Two of these were excluded: my institution due to ethical considerations and a member that identified as a campus (not an institution) of a large university. Cohen et al. (2011) suggested a sample size of 30 for quantitative research. Applying Cycyota and Harrison's (2006) 28% response rate for managers, sending a survey to all 74 members may produce a survey sample of approximately 21. The actual response rate was seven questionnaire respondents and much lower than hoped. Within that response rate, not all questions were answered and most of the quantitative questions only had four responses. That said, this data was collected as an adjunct to the research questions.

Accordingly, the quantitative data provides some interesting context, albeit not particularly valid or reliable due to its lack of predictability and replicability (Cohen et al., 2011).

In the survey sample, the institutional median of full-time enrolments (FTEs) was 2,100 and the mean 1,807; with a range covering 500 to 3,500 FTEs. The survey respondents employed a median of 421 and a mean of 353 full-time faculty and staff covering a range of 70 to 500 employees. Four survey respondents rated the adequacy of their institution's succession planning at a 3.25 weighted average on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). In the past five years, approximately 37% of middle managers, 39% of senior leaders, 38% of executive leaders, and 34% of presidents were internally recruited at four of the respondents' institutions. Human resource practitioners indicated that every employee group ranging from support staff to presidents had leadership development opportunities. All non-unionized instructional and non-instructional staff had succession planning practices in place. Only 50% of support staff, unionized instructional staff, executive leaders, and presidents had succession planning practices in place, while approximately 66% managers had succession planning in place.

The above breakdown of the quantitative portion of the survey describes the institutional sample context. However, the lack of quantitative responses meant this study ultimately resulted in being primarily qualitative, rather than mixed-methods. Gorard (2017) suggested there is a continuum of possibility with qualitative and quantitative methods being used. I had hoped to be further along the continuum of mixed-methods, but the limited amount of quantitative data that I was able to collect resulted in a primarily qualitative study with limited support of quantitative data.

For the qualitative, I initially hoped to interview at least one person from each province and territory to achieve a pan-Canadian perspective, adding up to 13 people. However, as I worked my way through the approval processes with Presidents and some research ethics boards, I ultimately interviewed 16 mid-to-senior leaders. It was not entirely clear if I would gain access to all provinces and territories as I invited participation across the country, so I kept interviewing until I deemed I had reached data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015) where I had enough information for my study to be replicated (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013) and no more significant information was provided with additional interview raw data, rather than focusing on representation from each province and territory.

**Gender and ethnic representation.**

I did not deliberately attempt to ensure gender representation in the qualitative sample of participants, nor did I ask how each participant identified as I did not view gender as a necessary construct for this research, nor did I want to perpetuate implicit bias similar to how one recruiting firm removes gender, age, and names from resumes to achieve diversity (Edge, Kachulis, & McKean, 2018). But, based on my perception alone, without expressly asking people's gender identities, I interviewed 11 (69%) males and 5 (31%) females, using a binary form of categorization, which may not be reflective of the participants' identity. Data on male versus female leadership representation in Canada's colleges and institutes is not available to my knowledge, although leadership teams at Canada's top 15 research-intensive universities – which are not part of this paper's population – were found to be 62.6% male and 37.4% female (Smith, 2017). Another data point comes from the United States in the American Council on Education's 2017 report which found there to be 30 percent female representation amongst the Presidents of

all institution types (Johnson, 2017). Therefore, albeit imperfect in terms of scope and scale, binary gender participation in this study is likely representative of the study's population.

Similarly, I did not expressly ask people to identify their ethnicity and people were not forthcoming with their personal ethnic background, therefore I am unable to assess what the participation rates were for visible minorities and Indigenous peoples. For me to hazard a guess of the participation rates would be uninformed. As a point of reference, however, Smith (2017) found there to be no female visible minorities or Indigenous members in senior leadership teams in Canada's top 15 research universities. I am not aware of similar research for Canada's colleges and institutes and other members of CICan.

***Qualitative validity.***

Overall, interview participation came from seven of the 13 provinces and territories, with 11 institutions participating. However, to assure the anonymity of the participants, a breakdown is not provided for which provinces and territories are represented in the sample.

To achieve internal and external validity for qualitative data, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) recommended taking such steps as prolonged researcher's engagement in the field of study, consistent observation, participant validation, conducting contrasts and comparisons. Given the length of time it took to access the participants due to a variety of factors (which are discussed later on in this chapter), I believe I had prolonged engagement in the field and consistent observation. Participant validation was achieved through the sending of anonymized draft findings to the interviewees for their review, and multiple incidences of comparison and contrasts were conducted throughout the data collection, coding, and analysis. Therefore, validity

is believed to have been achieved. Given that interviews were not conducted in all provinces and territories, there is the possibility of reduced generalizability. Still, as time went on with each interview, data saturation was observed with the conclusion that validity was increased.

**Ethical considerations and access.**

I obtained expedited ethical approval from the University of Liverpool (Appendix C) and my research proposal was accepted by both of my thesis supervisors before conducting any research.

I decided to contact the President (or equivalent) first as a way to respect the typical post-secondary hierarchy in Canada by viewing the President as the "gatekeeper" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 168). Accordingly, I reviewed each of the 74 institutions' websites for the President's (or equivalent or designate) email. I then emailed the President (or equivalent) of each institution defined above with an invitation to permit me to conduct succession planning research at their institution. Included in that email (Appendix D), I described the research project in the form of an invitation letter and the participant information sheets for interview (Appendix A) and questionnaire participants, along with the informed consent form (Appendix B). I also outlined the possible benefit to their institution with the offer of a copy of my completed thesis as a way to debrief and provide benefit (Cohen et al., 2011). In that same email, I requested permission to: a) contact a human resource designate to whom I could send the questionnaire to complete, and b) contact their mid-to-senior level administrators to collect expressions of interest for participating in semi-structured interviews. For those institutions where no direct email address was available, I emailed either the general inquiries email address or the President’s assistant, depending on

what was available on the institution's website. Upon receiving explicit permission from the President via email, or the President forwarding my email to their designate, I sent the questionnaire link (which also included informed consent wording where participants would not proceed in the questionnaire if they were not willing to provide informed consent) to the designate. I also sent the informed consent form (for reference only) and questionnaire participant information sheet to the human resource individual.

Additionally, I reached out to administrators as I found them from the institutions' website or, as the President forwarded my email to identify those who were interested in participating in the interview. I then sent the informed consent form, interview participant information sheet and guiding interview questions for their review at least five days before an agreed-upon date was determined to conduct the Skype interview. I did not start an interview until I received a signed informed consent form from the participant. There were challenges to coordinate correspondence with 74 institutions, along with navigating the varying ethics requirements from each institution. These challenges were not insurmountable. However, it meant that as potentially interested participants came forward, I needed to move away from the original aim to interview at least one person from every province and territory (13 in total).

All research in education can be sensitive; it just depends on the degree of sensitivity. I needed to be aware of my participants' contexts (Cohen et al., 2011) and prepare for possible sensitive content that could arise. Therefore, I needed to provide anonymity (Cohen et al., 2011). All questionnaires were conducted anonymously, and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data ensuring confidentiality throughout. At the same time, I also needed to retrieve data from interview participants more than once for such things as validation of themes (Cohen et al.,

2011). Therefore, I created a coding system using one file with interview participants' names with an assigned number. I then used a separate file with a different digital location for each transcript with the number. After transcribing all the interview transcripts, I removed all identifying factors, including gender. I transcribed each video within 30 days of the interview taking place, so interview videos did not need to be saved on my personal password-protected computer. Within seven months of conducting all interviews, I shared a broad listing of themes to request validation of themes (Appendix F) and shared the themed and anonymized interview findings with the interviewees to ensure individual and institutional anonymity was maintained.

Cohen et al. (2011) acknowledged ethical challenges could occur at any stage of a research project. By using an informed consent form for both the questionnaire and interview, I was able to encourage informed, voluntary, and ongoing consent to help the participants know they had a choice to start and continue participation. Because I reached out to Presidents first, there may have been unseen pressure to participate by any of the President's subordinates. By ensuring anonymity for both questionnaire and interview participants, the risk of pressure was reduced to that of minimal risk to the participants. Data were analyzed and shared in a way to make it impossible to identify individual and institutional contributions and only anonymized verbatim quotes were used, where warranted. All of the data collected during the research was secured in a password protected hard drive and will be destroyed five years after the study.

For each interview, I re-iterated the aim of the study, the purpose of the interview, and I referred to the participant interview sheet already shared and confirmed receipt of the signed informed consent form. I also re-confirmed their consent for the interview to be recorded, and reminded them to ask questions throughout the interview and address any concerns as they arose.

As long as technology allowed, I recorded all interviews except for three full interviews and part of another. For those interviews where I was not able to record because of technology challenges, I made notes. For those interviews where I made notes, I sent anonymized notes to the respective participant for them to review and validate for accuracy. All transcripts and validated interview notes were analyzed and coded with the assistance of NVivo and Excel software. To ensure participant's individual and institutional anonymity was preserved, I emailed my draft findings and discussion chapters to the interviewees to confirm they believed their anonymity was conserved.

**Researcher positionality.**

In one sense, my position as the researcher was as an outsider because I interviewed people from other institutions, and surveyed human resource departments from various provinces and territories. Additionally, this study brought me in touch with a variety of ethnicities due to the nature of the study and the inherent diversity of Canada, which further added to my outsider position. However, I could have been perceived as a sectoral insider, because I have worked in Canadian post-secondary for the last 15 years. Therefore, whilst interviewing participants, I might not have had an intimate understanding (Cormier, 2017) of the respective organizational cultures, classifying me as an outsider. Still, I believe I had a general sense of the issues the interviewees discussed, which helped engender trust and interviewee openness where I was able to share, on a higher level, common experiences with the participants (Kim, 2012).

Another element of positionality to consider was "linguistic positionality," where data collection can be impacted (Cormier, 2017, p. 328). I looked to interview participants across a

country that has two official languages: English and French, where many people do not have English as their first language, not least of which any participants who may have been First Nations. Although English fluency was a requirement to participate in this study, I may have interviewed people with whom English is not their first language, although that was not readily ascertainable. Cormier (2017) identified this could create a form of power that I, as the researcher, could hold over the participants. I am not aware this was an issue. However, during the interviews conducted, I endeavoured to be reflexive and aware of my linguistic positionality. At least two potential participants who expressed interest in participating requested the interview take place in French wholly or in part. Because of my inability to conduct a meaningful interview in French, these potential participants opted, understandably, not to participate.

Sharing similar backgrounds to my participants as an HE administrator (i.e., insider status) was an asset for data collection (Palmer, 2006) as interview participants were able to open up. I made sense of what the participants were talking about because of my similar career background. However, there was still a sense of 'outsiderness' as I was not interviewing people from my institution. I will also note my initial outsiderness was perhaps heightened when I reached out to Presidents as my first point of contact through my University of Liverpool email address. I was asked a couple times why someone from the United Kingdom was interested in rural Canadian post-secondary institutions. When I explained I was completing my doctorate of education through the University of Liverpool and a practicing administrator in a rural Canadian institution, I did not receive any further questions nor permission to access their institution. It is unknown if this element of outsiderness was a factor by those institutional non-responses.

## Data Analysis

### Interviews.

For this research project, I analyzed the qualitative data in various phases. The first phase occurred while I transcribed the interviews, and I internalized and reflected on the data and started to identify recurring thoughts or themes, which then informed subsequent semi-structured interviews. The second phase took place while I conducted line-by-line coding by creating unit-by-unit nodes within NVivo software using gerunds where possible to help me interact with the data as I studied the transcript fragments to identify emergent themes (Charmaz, 2014). The use of gerunds helped me think about the actions being described by the interviewees (Rompre, 2018). During this process, I sometimes assigned multiple nodes to the same data-line which highlighted emergent and recurring themes within. At the end of this phase, there were approximately 1,300 distinct codes. For the third phase of analysis, I adopted focused coding, which allowed me to sort and categorize the large amount of data (Charmaz, 2014). To facilitate more straightforward analysis and categorizing, I transferred all of the individual nodes from NVivo into Excel and started to sort the nodes into separate tabs. Some of the codes I could use directly as a focused code, others took shape as I compared them against other initial codes, as Charmaz (2014) describes. As I was doing this focused coding by broad topics, I was also writing memos beside unit codes to highlight areas I might explore more deeply (Charmaz, 2014), or where I was starting to see connections with other data points. Additionally, I was often referring back to the transcripts themselves by working my way backward from the focused codes to the individual nodes to the lines of transcripts, which were attached to those codes to reflect further. Charmaz (2014) recommended to “keep coming back to the quotes that won’t leave you alone”

(p. 194). I not only did this but also revisited the codes which kept coming to my mind as I read other codes and wrote memos. Within each tab, I conducted further focused coding to identify certain facets within each topic. The writing of memos was also helpful to solidify my thinking and build my theoretical groupings. An additional part of my iterative sense-making was utilizing the online University of Liverpool EdD conference, where I took advantage of this opportunity to present my preliminary findings, my first grappling with a possible theoretical model, and explore the imaginative side of grounded theory.

Subsequent to reviewing the emergent themes, I emailed a summary of the strongest themes to the interview participants (see Appendix F) for them to validate, expand upon, or question. Generally speaking, interviewees agreed with the themes identified to broadly reflect their lived experience. Slowly a model emerged in my mind's eye.

**Surveys.**

The survey's first five questions were quantitative. Not all the institutions responded, and because responses were anonymous, it is not clear which of the interviewees' institutions responded. The response rate was low for the overall survey respondents, and on a question-by-question basis. Therefore, these results do not provide reliable data or data with predictive validity. However, they give a brief, albeit incomplete, summary of the participants' institutional size (where some of the interview participants work), and the human resource designates' sense of their institution's leadership development and succession planning practices. The last two questions were qualitative, where respondents were asked to describe their respective institutions' leadership development and succession planning practices. These answers were summarized and

themed where possible and memos were written to show connections with the interview findings, although not in as an extensive manner as with the interview data. However, given the low response rate, these data points were primarily used to validate the qualitative interview data.

## Conclusion

As I reflect on my design and undertaking this research, my research questions arose from my curiosity and observation of higher education practice, rather than the literature. But, the lack of literature on the topic of succession planning in Canadian HE, and rural post-secondary in particular meant there was an opening to address the research problem through learning from the experiences and insights of the participants. Accordingly, I needed a methodology to enable me to do this. As I explored the possibilities on how to do the research, I saw there were numerous possibilities. Exploring the different theoretical epistemologies helped me understand more fully and embrace my ontological social constructivist perspective.

My ontological perspective informed why I chose informed constructive grounded theory over other theoretical frameworks such as critical realism and action research. As I combined my ontology with my framework, keeping my research questions in mind, I also considered which methods to use. As intriguing as focus groups were, I opted to attempt a mixed-methods approach, with an emphasis on qualitative data collection so I could extend my understanding beyond what may have been possible with just one method. The use of open-ended, semi-structured interviews opened the door for surprising data to be collected and the use of an abductive and imaginative approach to analyze the data. Given the diverse geographical and legislative settings my participants operated in, I was pleased with the diversity I achieved in the

sample. I had initially hoped for more but was thankful for both my insider and outsider research positionalities, where I could interact with and learn from my interviewees despite our different contexts within which we work.

It took time to build my research approach, iteratively analyze the data, and make those abductive connections. The process of thinking deeply on all aspects of this study was rewarding, and the next chapters will provide a discussion of the emergent themes and the proposed theoretical model which materialized as a result.

# Chapter 4:

# Research Findings

This chapter focuses on the qualitative data primarily collected through the semi-structured interviews of 16 mid-to-senior level post-secondary leaders. The very limited qualitative data gathered from the survey (refer to Appendix E) questions 6 (three respondents) and 7 (four respondents) add to the themes explored in this chapter. The qualitative data is broken into themes focusing both on individuals and institutions, which emerged from initial line-by-line coding and then focused coding. It should be noted that the limited quantitative data collected in the questionnaires such as student and employee FTEs, level of satisfaction with institutional succession planning, percentage of internal recruited employees, and level of leadership development and succession planning practices for each employee group have been referenced in Chapter 3 to help further describe the research sample and will not expressly be itemized in Chapter 4 as they do not directly contribute to answering the research questions.

As I analyzed the qualitative interview data, I began to see an overarching framework where participants were identifying three levels that may impact and be impacted by succession planning: themselves and their team members, their organization, and also organizations and networks that extend beyond the organization in which they work. These levels provide a framework in which the key emergent themes are organized. Within the first level of individuals, this chapter provides an overview of interviewee profiles, as well as themes which arose as they reflected on their career progression. At the organizational level, this chapter outlines the current gaps in the participants' institutional succession planning and current succession planning practices, which range from formal practices to informal methods of praxis. Finally, this chapter summarizes themes to consider when contemplating the institutions which operate in a variety of jurisdictional and sectoral networks.

## Interviews

### Individual as employee.

This section will describe the interview participants by presenting the range of participants' profiles, then move into a description and analysis of the themes arising from the interviews at the individual level as the participants reflected on their career progression as employees.

#### *Interviewees' profile.*

As vast as the country of Canada is, the public post-secondary sector, particularly within the membership of Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan), is a relatively small network. Therefore, to maintain the anonymity of the participants and their institutions, I will not itemize the number of positions, nor provide individual profiles. Instead, I offer a brief overview of the range of participants for a sense of the variety amongst the administrators despite having been identified for this study as working in rural post-secondary institutions.

The current roles represented in the sample ranged from president to associate dean (with responsibility for at least one institutional department). As such, no one was currently in a unionized position, which is common in Canada, where unions typically represent front-line and instructional staff in post-secondary, but not those in managerial positions. However, a number of the participants did come from unionized service or faculty positions, having moved up from within their current or other institutions. All but two of the participants had previously worked in sectors outside of higher education such as banking, trades, government, health care, finance, public accounting, agriculture, and private business, and elementary and secondary education. Of note, one participant left HE to work in industry and then opted to come back.

Interviewees had been in their current positions anywhere from a few months to 14 years and had been at their current institutions for a few months to nearly 30 years. The participants identified a range of functions covered in their current careers, such as accounting, faculty administration, executive administration, human resources, mental health care, research administration, government administration, and student services administration. Some had only ever worked in their current province/territory; some had moved between jurisdictions during their career. A few of the interviewees had only ever worked in the city or town where they were currently situated. Of particular note, two of the participants were alumni of the institutions where they were currently working.

The participants' range of education levels spanned from undergraduate degrees to doctorate degrees, with at least two participants acknowledging their additional professional certifications as they provided a brief overview of their career progression. Some of the participants had formal education in leadership, while others had formal training in business or human resources. Others had formal education in discipline-specific areas, which did not directly tie to their current positions' main administrative functions. While the above points are not broken out by participant, the overriding theme is the diversity in the participants' pathways to their current positions. The participants represent a variety of education levels, hierarchical positions, and career backgrounds, which intimates there is not a 'one size fits all' or requisite homogeneity in rural post-secondary leadership.

People, institution, think, and know were the top four words to emerge after building a word cloud based on all sixteen anonymized, unedited (except for the removal of names, identifiers, and gender-specific pronouns) transcripts. The top four words run the spectrum from

the individual to the organization, from thinking to knowing, suggesting participants were constantly reflecting between themselves and their institutions, and comparing what they or others thought to what they knew.

The participants' career narratives span a spectrum of expertise and experience, which makes for a rich set of data. And yet, despite the variety, some themes were emerging from their career progression recollections with a balance between micro- (individual) and meso- (organizational or departmental) level reflections.

### *Career narratives.*

This section takes a meta-themed approach to identify emergent themes from the lived succession planning experiences of interviewees, to help lay the groundwork of insights to improve succession planning practices. By forming a composite of themes which describe the lived experiences, I can start to answer the overarching research question:

*How can the lived succession planning experiences of rural Canadian HE institutional administrators provide insights into how institutions might improve their succession planning practices?*

#### *Being selective in positions.*

"I don't really want that."

Participants changed positions and places of work for a number of reasons, but an underlying theme of intent to progress one’s career emerged. For some, this involved choosing

not to apply for positions within their organizations although they were 'tapped' on the shoulder by a colleague or supervisor who suggested they apply. After being invited to apply for an associate dean position and then consulting with friends who had been associate deans, one interviewee concluded: "that's one of the last jobs I want." This interviewee's institutional leadership may have gathered this person was selective because later on the President and another senior leader took this interviewee out for coffee to ask them to consider a specific Director position. The interviewee ultimately decided to apply for this post as it was more what they wanted to do because “out of all the administrative positions at the [Institution], this is the only one I want.” One individual was clear they were not interested in advancing from Vice-President to President due to the type of work a President does: “I don’t know if it will ever be what I want to do, but it's certainly not now." This selectivity did not come from internal exploratory conversations, rather what they observed their President doing.

While the focus of this project was institutions situated in rural areas, one participant noted they left a teaching position in the K-12 (Kindergarten to Grade 12) system to work in higher education because the K-12 teaching job was too remote for them. This move is an example of just one factor which contributed to a participant’s desire to relocate for work.

Some of the participants’ selectivity arose after they took on acting roles. One participant reflected on their time as acting President: "I've moved back into my [Vice-President] role, which is where I feel the most comfortable. President…was not – it was – anyway, we did it, we got through it…but that’s a different ball game.” Another spoke about their time as acting Vice-President: "I've had a little bit of the taste and…I'm at a good spot, and I don't really want that." The acting roles appear to have provided clarity to the interviewees.

*Looking for change or challenge.*

"I don't want to be stagnant."

The same interviewee who decided that advancing up the hierarchy after taking on interim roles was not something they wanted, also shared that while they did not want to advance their career by moving up the organization, they explained “I want stretch opportunities, I want to learn, I don’t want to be stagnant…I’m happy to step in and help wherever I can…but I do not want the job.” Additionally, they left higher education for industry because the role they had at the time left them feeling unchallenged.

One participant left industry to join HE because “it was time to leave…as there was [*sic*] lots of legal and political challenges at the time, and I was also bored," and when they felt they had done the work they set out to do in a particular academic position, they were "ready for a change again." Others left industry or the K-12 system because they had been unsuccessful in advancing their career, so they applied for a position in HE. One person described themselves as getting “antsy” and looking for change approximately every five years.

*Intentional altruism.*

“give back”

There was a thread of deliberately choosing to be in HE to do good. One individual saw a higher education job posting advertised while they were in industry and decided to apply because they wanted to "give back," and because, at the time, the economy was in a downturn where work

was uncertain. Working in post-secondary appeared to meet both the interviewee's altruistic desires and their financial needs.

Another applied to join a particular institution because the President so inspired them that they were willing to take on a position that was lower than they were qualified for, just to work at the same institution as the President. Another thought they could be more efficient at helping people if they obtained a management position in post-secondary.

*Lack of a plan.*

"just the way it worked out"

Despite participants being selective in their positions, there was also a marked theme of many appearing not to have a long-term plan for their career. Part of this lack materialized through an improvisational approach of sorts. One participant decided to drop off their resume at the institution with no specific posting in mind when they moved to the city to see if there might be interest in hiring them. Another opted to apply for a senior management position to see if they could "run [their] own shop." Another explained they applied for a job even though they did not think they would get it, but at least they would be in a room with people interviewing them.

"There wasn't a big master plan where I sat down and sketched this all out."

Only one alluded to any kind of plan, and even then, they admitted they were only ever thinking ahead by two to three years. Another described their career as applying for positions as they came up if they were interesting. One went so far as to say they had never given their career progression any thought until their supervisor approached them: "…the dean came to me one day,

and we talked about what I would like to do next, and I hadn't really given it any thought." I never heard people speak about their ultimate career goal other than those who were nearing retirement and feeling their current position was the one from which they would retire.

Some shared a bit of surprise regarding their being hired or being approached to apply. One participant described it as the "very idea they hired me seemed a bit odd to me," and another explained, "I won the competition even though I was probably a bit of a long shot." Another described how they felt when they were asked to apply for a particular job: "it kind of blew me away a little bit" and when they were put into leadership training soon after starting their position, "I was kind of channelled in that very quickly, and I was wondering why the heck am I doing this…?". Another highlighted that they progressed into three different and higher-level positions over three years. Humility is infused with surprise where one described it as "you wake up one day, and you have a title behind your name…and you think how in the heck did that happen?". Rather than humility, one participant also reflected that, perhaps, some of their surprise came from having imposter syndrome.

Some even saw their advancement as a function of timing or luck. "I guess my timing was…I was at the right time, at the right place to be part of that new way of thinking." A participant described their experience of impressing a future supervisor at a conference they were speaking at as a "strange thing, coincidence," which precipitated a secondment position. Everyone who spoke about being at the right time or place appeared to reflect on those times with gratitude and humility. One reflected on their career progression within their current institution saying the institution had "been very good to me," further reflecting gratitude.

*Uniqueness.*

"I have an unusual career path."

Several participants also felt their career progression into and through higher education was unique. They seemed intrigued by the twists and turns their career took:

"I haven't entered into academia in any kind of a stereotypical fashion."

"I have a long but brief career history."

"…it's not your typical…route to where I am now. No."

"I'm nowhere near where I thought I would be."

Uniqueness ties closely with the previously discussed theme of many lacking a plan, but it also differentiates in that there appeared to be a sense of pride and gratitude in many of the participants' tone when recalling their unique career pathways.

*Conversational guidance.*

"I hadn't even thought about it."

The lack of an overall plan alongside gratitude highlighted the pivotal role supervisors and senior leaders played in participants' career progression. A few conversations have been highlighted where direct supervisors or higher-level leaders approached participants to consider taking on or applying for positions. The importance of conversation and relationship were recurring themes as people reflected on their advancement. One went so far as to say they had

turned down a temporary position. But, because their supervisor needed somebody and kept asking, the participant agreed to take on an acting role as a favour to their supervisor, circling back to the theme of altruism previously discussed. Another remarked, "I've been very fortunate here…in the sense that people recognize the work that needs to be done [and]…my own skill set and abilities".

Often the term of being tapped on the shoulder came up, which, for many people, meant either their supervisor or other colleagues in the institution encouraged them to apply for particular positions. Many appreciated being told such things as "you're well respected, you've got a lot of weight with your voice…that kind of encouragement was really helpful," and "we might want to think about doing something beyond your current job." One saw these moments as a signal to consider beyond the here and now. Another interviewee laughingly said when describing being tapped on the shoulder as “I hadn’t even thought about it. No (laughing). Hadn’t even thought about it.” Tapping was noted as happening in unplanned side conversations between the ‘tappee’ and ‘tapper’ where the tapper took the initiative to pull the blinders off the interviewees’ eyes.

Whereas interviewees noted it was often others initiating these conversations, the survey results from the human resource departments suggest they expect the employee to initiate their career development discussions. There were mechanisms such as formalized performance management systems that could facilitate or invite employees to identify their career goals. Nonetheless, regardless of who was responsible for starting the discussion, both the interviewees and survey respondents acknowledged the importance of conversation.

*Generalization.*

"…the variety of hats…has benefitted me tremendously."

A final theme emerging from participants' career narratives was the variety of tasks and roles they had, particularly in smaller institutions throughout their careers. This theme resonates with my experience working in a small college as Dean overseeing three very distinct departments. Two participants outlined times in their career where they were holding two different positions at once. A number of the participants described the variety of roles they had within the institution, sometimes moving between locations or campuses, and functional areas. Some noted that over time, they had additional duties or areas of responsibility added to their portfolio, requiring the ability to apply lessons learned to a broadening scope of concern. One reflected on the differences between small and large institutions and noted that in a smaller institution, "somebody sooner or later is going to go, where is this person and why aren't they wearing the five hats that we need them to wear?". Most participants spoke about this phenomenon as something that 'just happens' and is a result of being recognized as competent and capable. One participant saw their first experience of working in a small institution where their multiple roles were foundational:

> …the variety of hats you wear has benefitted me tremendously throughout my career as I can walk into pretty much any [meeting] and have some concept of what's going on and how to contribute to it, so that has been really helpful to me and looking back, without that experience, I would not be where I am in my career currently.

One spoke more negatively: “I just kind of took over [a department] and it just got dumped on me, and then when I became [Vice President], it was just a title change, and you're responsible for everything."

***Conclusion.***

Participants did not recall straight career pathways, which made me wonder as the interviews progressed whether the hegemonic metaphor of a pipeline was relevant in rural Canadian post-secondary institutions. The picture of a pipeline denotes to me a singular and impermeable journey where one does not have much interplay with the various factors that are influencing post-secondary. The pipeline is an industrial metaphor where industry, as a system, needs to map out all possible ebbs and flows. The participants did not often speak about whether their institutions or even their supervisors had a clear sense of how their personal careers should progress. While some of the participants may not have been explicit in their sense of agency or intervention in their career, they were aware of many other factors that impacted their career. This made me wonder if post-secondary operates within a more malleable, flexible, open-ended, and non-linear metaphor than a pipeline might otherwise suggest.

Early in my interviews, the picture of weaving together a fabric came to mind, rather than envisioning a pipeline for potential and current leaders. As interviews progressed, this idea was explored further through exploratory questions. I wondered how one might gain and benefit from exposure to a variety of functions and levels within the organization, utilizing the previously discussed existing theories to help frame an emergent theory.

**Organization.**

The previous section explored the emergent themes from the participants' career narratives. The following section explores the themes which surfaced as the participants reflected on their observations of how others, including direct reports, can prepare junior colleagues to succeed or advance their career, in conjunction with a post-secondary leader's intervention and participation, with an organizational lens.

> I think we have a deep responsibility to be authentic and genuine and truthful about the kind of environment a person would either be promoted into or come into in terms of where we are, where we're going and how we're going to get there.

***Succession planning revisited.***

> I hate calling it succession planning because it should be called good management and every single manager should be contemplating what's the future of my department, what skills are needed, and who do I have, and what do I need to bring in to make it better.

Before I dive too deeply into the emergent themes surrounding succession planning itself, I will revisit the concept of succession planning to keep it top of mind while I share the findings. As will be demonstrated, and has already been supported by exploring the interviewees' career progression, there is a heavy emphasis on the development of individuals – even when asked how their institution's succession planning should change. Richards (2009), in their study of succession planning in select American HE institutions, also found there was a lack of clarity in understanding between succession planning and leadership development. Succession planning,

while related to leadership development, requires a strategic process for the institution to build and develop competent and qualified people for all levels with the goal of organizational stability (Titzer et al., 2014). Succession planning needs to consider all of the human capital sources, both internal and external. Indeed, two participants noted the lack of leadership stability was negatively impacting their institution's morale: "at the senior level, we used to have really great conversations…that included professional development…or just more supportive, but it has fallen off, perhaps because there was so much change in our departments – people coming and going and restructuring, just kind of like a hot potato." Leadership development can happen in isolation for the benefit of the employee alone.

In contrast, succession planning should provide a framework which incorporates employees' goals and aligns them with institutional strategic and leadership directions. The opening quote in this section was one of the few instances where an interviewee saw the linkage between where and how individuals want to grow and institutional direction and values. But for this to happen, the institution needs to undergo self-reflection on where and who the institution wants to be.

Most interviewees were not aware of a formalized succession planning system in their current or previous institutions. Any movement of people to succeed others was more about the individual preparing themselves for future opportunities in an organic fashion. Indeed, most survey respondents noted their institutions did not have succession plans or related frameworks. When succession did happen, it seemed to be by accident. However, both the interviewees and survey respondents identified the critical role conversation played in developing people.

### ***Gaps in current institutional succession planning.***

"We…talk about developing people, but do we really?...are we very good at succession planning?".

This section explores the identified gaps in institutions' succession planning from the interviewees' perspective, many of which resonated with me and my observations when comparing my time in the private sector and public post-secondary. The qualitative portion of the questionnaire also identified there are gaps; indeed three of the respondents noted their institution did not have formal succession plans or frameworks.

#### *Lack of communication about succession planning.*

"…I think ***I*** might be the President's succession plan, but I'm not sure…it's not something [they] and I've talked about."

Many noted there was not much discussion about succession planning. The previous quote is particularly poignant as this participant suspected they were their supervisor's planned successor, but they were not sure because it had not been discussed. This same participant disclosed they were not interested in becoming President at this time, which is problematic. This misalignment is an example where the interviewee's selectivity, as discussed earlier in the Individual as Employee Section, conflicts with the organizational lack of communication. When asked how explicit they would describe their institution's communication about succession planning, one participant responded, "I don't think it is. I don't think it's explicit." Another noted their Executive team had only just started discussing the topic the week before the interview. In

that discussion, the group noted they are not doing succession planning despite its importance. For some, when the question was posed how they would like their institution's succession planning to change, the answer simply was just start talking about it. However, some were not clear on what they should talk about or how to frame those conversations.

*Lack of alignment between words and action.*

"…we say all the right things, but sometimes I would say we don't do the right things."

While some felt there was insufficient communication about succession planning, others identified that some leaders and departments did talk about the importance of succession planning but with a lack of action to support those words. So, while there appeared to be agreement that succession planning was important, there was not much action, which builds on the first identified gap of communication. One observed that when discussion occurred it was about the planned leaving dates of executives, but "that's about it." The conversation also appears to ebb and flow depending on what is occurring in top management teams: "There was a lot more succession planning when I first started in this role because the President was leaving, … and the associate or the Vice President was hoping they would get it. But…I would say in the last two and a half years we haven't talked much at all about VP succession planning."

*Lack of structure, strategy, and prioritization.*

"…we're reactionary, no succession planning, just replacement."

Participants identified that succession planning depends on the conversations and interactions taking place between supervisors and their employees, the direction senior leadership

provides, and the amount of time they spend visioning what succession planning should look like. One participant suggested succession is “as critical as selection and onboarding” within human resource practices. So, there was a desire for more time to be spent talking about succession planning to build out the strategy. Some were looking for guidance and hoping to learn from other institutions on how to do succession planning to inform their institution’s strategy or structure.

Others felt discussion about where and what the institution wants to be needed to be infused in those intentional conversations, along with what is the leadership philosophy of the institution.

> We don’t have as strategic plan in place as I think we need to have and in terms of whether it’s overall succession planning or individual career planning because we know we’re going to need to fill…a whole variety of positions.

This participant was suggesting there could and should be a strategy for the institutional succession planning program and the development of leaders and individuals’ careers. It also confirms the call for succession planning to permeate all levels of the organization where there are numerous high performers at each level who can fill vacancies. The survey respondents also confirmed there is generally a lack of strategy. One survey respondent said: “We do not formally succession plan, but rather this is done almost accidentally.” If there were a strategy in place, there could be reduced uncertainty about whether institutions will be able to recruit (internally or externally) the right people, rather than leaving it up to luck as suggested by one participant: "I don't think we do it very well, the succession planning part of it. I feel like we've been pretty lucky…because we've been able to attract and keep [people] because they want to be in this

region." Another suggested that for there to be a plan in place, then institutional mindset would need to change first: "I heard it in a whole different context; it's WTF: wishful thinking forever and…we think everything will carry on as it is."

Not all institutions were completely lacking any kind of structure or system. One participant had a personally developed colour-coded system of all of the key positions within the organization, which identified those which were most likely to be vacant in prioritization.

> I have a strong passion for kind of growing your own…we're getting that individual up to speed so that [they're] almost going to be a natural choice to take over for [them] as a member of that leadership team. So we do that, we've identified within, potentially who could and who can't.

This system helped the leader identify key positions and start to be on the lookout for possible replacements. This was the only developed coding system that came up in conversation with the participants. However, another participant was currently working on developing a system to help them be ready to fill gaps if and when they arose by investing in critical places. Another institution had its own internal emerging leaders' program to serve two purposes: "it's really instilling the values and the beliefs of the [institution] and what we stand for, that's one. Number two, it's over a two-year period, so it's more in-depth [than CICan Leadership training or the Chair Academy]…and…we can watch the growth and see if it's in line with where we want to go as an organization."

There were two who reminisced positively of past organizations. One was a small private college in a different country, which used its Masters level programming and subsequent work placements as a way to prepare future managers for other institutions:

> There was definitely an expectation that we would see different experiences and that we would seek different environments, and that was…never in writing. Reflecting on it - that was really a leadership value that was communicated to us by our leadership…

Another spoke of their time in a corporate setting, which had a management development program and "a superb succession management story." They went on to explain what the company did to compete with much larger companies:

> So, they hired six people every year, new grads and made them supernumerary partners to directors or vice presidents to learn the business in the two years that you're in the program. You spent six months within different departments, so you should have four placements and their idea - they were teaching us to be managers, learn the business, and through that time, you could pick a specialty and where you wanted to focus your career.

They continued to outline how that program helped them set their career trajectory. In both of these cases, while quite different approaches, there was an across-the-board intentionality, with collective buy-in from leadership and the understanding that succession management required investment to provide employees with exposure to a variety of experiences. For both of these participants, although their experiences took place in different contexts, they were still highly impactful.

Possible factors for the lack of systemic structure are external environmental factors such as political, fiscal policies and legislation, as seen in the quotes below:

> …the composition of the senior leadership team has been skewed by …wage restraint legislation. So, jobs that are considered designated positions, so those that are executives or report directly to the CEO have had a pay freeze for…years. So, because of that, nobody as organizations have changed [*sic*].

"I think if they had an opportunity to be able to and act a succession plan, I think they would. …it's the budget that drives majority of the things in post-secondary now."

> Sometimes I just feel that whether you're an internal candidate or an external candidate or you're an employee working at a post-secondary institution that your value is not appreciated at times and that…it's hard to do though…so many external things are affecting post-secondary that we have no control: tuition freeze, budget restraints…that we're losing a lot of people out of post-secondary…

The absence of a succession plan or a related framework might appear as a problem for institutions. However, an intriguing comparison of this theme with survey quantitative questions 3 and 4 is that institutions rated their institution 3.3 out of 5 in terms of satisfaction with their succession planning practices, and anywhere from 33 to 40% of the four identified employee groups were filled from internal applicants. This level of satisfaction suggests the lack of a succession plan or framework may not concern human resource departments.

There was one who felt if they were strategic and intentional, they might be able to reconfigure the budget to make something work for their institution:

> Years ago, there was a … program um, I'm trying to think of what it was called, it was a mentorship program anyway where they actually set aside funds to have people job-shadow and they would still be paid their regular salary plus a bit of an increase to do the job shadowing of a mentor and then the manager I believe received some sort of funding, as well, and it's been a long time since that's happened and again giving budgets and what we're anticipating in the next year's budget, we're not going to be flush with money, but I think if we put together a very good program we could probably find some funding.

That said, the budget constraints are real, so while prioritization is desired, "… we need something that is not resource-intensive."

*Lack of knowledge management.*

> I think that may be one of the major challenges facing our institution is we…don't have a systemic approach to that somebody [*sic*] leaves unless they've worked very closely with other people left behind a lot of that knowledge leaves with them.

From the earliest interviews, along with discussions with my thesis supervisors, a question arose about what are institutions or leaders doing about knowledge management or the capture of the knowledge or history that might 'walk out the door' if an employee, and particularly a leader, were to leave the organization. While this was not part of the original interview protocol, it did

come up from time to time in subsequent interviews. Often, when the question was posed about knowledge management, there were shaking heads and sometimes even laughter, implying knowledge management is a gap in their organization. There was agreement that not having some sort of management or attempt to capture the knowledge was an organizational risk and vulnerability. There was also agreement that institutions were not doing much to address this issue despite the desire for institutional leaders to have more corporate memory of the organization. If anything were to be put in place, the amount of resources would need to be minimal. Some ideas that arose for consideration were to use shared drives to store any information, create a buddy system as a backup where people are often touching base on particular projects, provide regular (possibly weekly) updates to supervisors on project status, and, where possible, make time for the outgoing employee to have overlapping time with the incoming replacement.

One participant suggested if there were consistent and robust communication taking place then the risk could be mitigated: "So, I think it's important that when senior people leave if your structure is such that they were able to communicate well with people within the institution, you mitigate that loss of wisdom and knowledge."

***Current succession planning practices in rural Canadian post-secondary.***

The previous section highlighted the main themes that interviewees identified as lacking in their institutions regarding succession planning. This is not to say that elements of succession planning and particularly its subset of leadership development are not occurring, nor that all participants were completely dissatisfied with their institution’s succession planning. When asked

how they would like their institution's succession planning to change, one interviewee said, "I don't think I would like it to change," and another described their institution's plans for succession as "…overall, I am happy with it. I'm happy with it because we have a nice balance of formal and informal." But, these sentiments of satisfaction were not widespread amongst the participants.

This section will outline what is currently happening in the participants' institutions across the country, albeit more in the subset of leadership development/encouragement.

*Being present.*

"Maybe I'm just old school."

The interviewees highlighted some of the challenges of trying to balance the attraction of new talent to organizations, keeping existing strong talent, and making space for meaningful connections to take place. A few leaders noted their organizations were trying to use technology to help people be present at multiple campuses, if at least virtually, while creating opportunities for employees to spend less time commuting between campuses, and home. One of the challenges for the more remote institutions appeared to be the availability of reliable bandwidth. Indeed, this constraint of reliable bandwidth and technology was experienced over the course of conducting interviews, as mentioned in Chapter 3.

People acknowledged the physical presence of leaders helps with building the culture of the institution while connecting with students (student-centred leadership is one of the desirable characteristics of promotable talent as identified by some participants). There was also the belief that leaders need to be visible, emails do not replace face-to-face interactions, and as one

participant said, "I've learned in terms of leadership…there is a quality that physical presence has…that…cannot be replaced". Being physically present is irreplaceable. Some found employees who want to work at home as a challenge to their leadership philosophy and even difficult to define the intangible impact of physical presence: "it's really hard to know what's going on by email and phone, so I don't know, it's intangible, I'm not doing a good job explaining it." Another questioned whether working virtually would work in their institution but also that leaders could not be present at all campuses and buildings simultaneously. Some recognized physical presence can help build one's social capital network, and identify talent.

To be able to do the tapping, participants felt that leaders need to have a connection and opportunity to watch the employees in action. These small, informal touchpoints impact how people are developed and how they develop others. Interviewees acknowledged a challenge despite the changing openness to working virtually (note: the interviews took place prior to the coronavirus pandemic) and the belief that one can only lead by distance for so long before the "network of leadership" would break down.

One interviewee recognized their organization needed to develop more guidelines regarding how working at home might work for the organization: "…the issue is we have all sorts of different…expectations and different rules and how different people view the role. So, we don't have any rules at all, no policy, no procedures on flexible work or work from home." There is a desire to be flexible to recruit or keep good candidates. One noted that even amongst their executive leadership, flexible work was impacting the executive's relationships:

> I think that is something that our Executive leadership team has to struggle with. Our VP [A] is here all the time, but the President and VP [B] are not, they are sometimes only on campus one or two days a week. I think that is something that in a rural [institution] can be challenging,…it's just working around it and finding a way that it doesn't negatively impact because I think it is the reality that people want more flexibility in their work.

Alternately, one participant described that even though their institution had not fully realized its intended succession planning framework:

> In terms of the overall culture here, I would say that we have a President and a Vice-President who are really committed to developing people and to hiring good people and then developing from within. [The senior leader gets] involved in most HR decisions and is really insightful and really helpful in that it's not obstructive at all. It's really constructive to have [their] input…. I would just say there's a very, very supportive, positive culture of making sure that we hire good people and then develop them and manage them well.

While it may not be possible to have the President and Vice-President involved in all hiring decisions for all institutions, this participant appreciated the executive leaders' input and guidance even though not all succession planning practices were in place yet.

One participant made the connection between social capital and physical presence:

> I wrote about social capital…in my thesis…because I think that's what builds a network of leadership, and that's what helps - just a hallway conversation can make a huge

> difference in how the organization functions. And when you're not here for more than half the time, I think that the fibre of that network of social capital, those linkages just aren't built or they breakdown.

One interviewee recounted on a past position:

> It was interesting back then because I think there wasn't a whole lot of that talking about future – you know, the whole succession planning and talent management like there was none of that…there were a lot of problems, so [they] had [their] hands full….we didn't have those kinds of conversations, no.

They went on to discuss another position where they had put their name forward for a stretch opportunity: "My supervisor is very supportive, and even though I put my name on the…list, there was no follow-up. [They're] likely too busy, but perhaps not interested because there's no urgency."

*Tapping.*

"I think the tap on the shoulder happens more, sort of encouraging people to go, so…that's good..."

I have already noted how being tapped by a leader was instrumental for interviewees in their career progression. Delving more deeply into this from an organizational perspective, one interviewee observed more tapping happened in the post-secondary system than what they saw in the K-12 system: "…it's a different world, for sure." Another noted they found the tapping validating because they did not know the influence they had within the organization until the

tapping occurred: "...they would say things like 'you're well respected, you've got a lot of weight with your voice even though you don't have the position,' so that…kind of encouragement was really helpful."

*Mentoring/coaching.*

> But they [previous mentors] were obviously the ones, looking back, who had my future in mind, and I try and bring that forward with my staff now. You know, I'm not going to walk in and be sunshine and lollipops all the time, but I will walk in and ask the hard questions, and I guarantee you if they find the answers, they've moved themselves ahead a little bit.

A thread connecting the individuals' reliance on conversation and guidance, with the aforementioned organizational activities of leaders being present and shoulder tapping, is relationship. Or looking at it within a grounded theory framework and an emphasis on action or gerunds (Charmaz, 2014) - the act of mentoring and coaching.

Mentoring was an oft-mentioned topic, but not strong uniformity from the data on how it worked or how people experienced it. Some highly valued past mentors who had a lasting impact on those relationships. Others said they tried having a mentor, and it was not beneficial for them. Some felt mentoring should happen organically; some felt there needed to be more formalized mentoring. Some participants were approached to be mentors or mentees; some did the approaching themselves. Some advocated for the supervisor to be an employee's mentor; some suggested a mentor should be someone else. Some saw mentoring as a privilege and, perhaps, even a joy. In contrast, another participant saw egos as a barrier to more mentoring occurring:

"You want your direct reports to be good, but not too good." Ergo, the consistency surrounding mentoring was that there was inconsistent practice.

Social capital is built at individual, inter-departmental, inter-institutional, and inter-sectoral levels, but how one made one's social capital could depend on the context. "So, there could be different ways of building that social capital. One being seen, and one by doing, right? And so, looking at what are…the ways to build that…?". For those participants who had worked at both large and small institutions, they noticed differing philosophies between the two. The one institution which noted it had an internal leadership development program also acknowledged the 2-year program incorporated a mentoring component, which could be internal or external to the organization, and could enable the crafting of one's relationship networks.

Related to this was executive coaching. While not many participants experienced executive coaching, nor did it come up as a consistent institutional practice, those who used executive coaching for themselves found it to be a "game-changer" and a "godsend" for their leadership journey. Others noted they often used techniques or lessons learned from their executive coaching experience to their developmental conversations with their direct reports. Therefore, while this was not a repeated theme across all participants, it warrants mentioning because of the overwhelmingly positive reviews of its effectiveness suggesting that training leaders in coaching (executive, cognitive, or other) could be beneficial for employees' development and performance management.

One caveat which emerged was much of the mentoring and coaching was happening in isolation. While individual leaders were attempting to signal their leadership values to their direct

reports, it was not always clear this was happening in a coordinated fashion within every institution.

> With…some of the processes happening internally, there definitely are I'd say shoulder-tapping and…mentoring in some informal ways. Again, we don't do a formal mentorship program, and I think we could benefit greatly from that. Every time we start talking down that path…some roadblock comes in because…managers don't have the time, because things fall apart, because there just isn't the time. It's just not made a priority. But, I have seen certainly situations where supervisors are very supportive about certain people within their departments.

Another appreciated the regular nature of meeting with their mentor:

> …I had a great mentor at the time, it was the dean of the department…and [they were] very proactive when it came to making sure that we met on a regular basis and that we talked the issues through…there was [*sic*] examples that were going on within the department here that was [*sic*]…good…examples to work from as far as information gathering.

The example above highlights the importance of finding a connection and understanding of the context in which the mentee works. Another noted that having a mentor from a different education sector (K-12), was not particularly helpful: "[w]hen I did my Chair Academy, I picked a principal as my mentor, but they didn't understand some of my frames of reference, so ideally get someone from a similar world."

*Combined initiative for the good of employee and institution.*

> So we develop, and we create a pathway, and someone gets really trained and developed, and they're on a track, and they apply for jobs and don't get it, and they leave; that's okay. That's…not a bad thing for us.

A theme, regardless of the type of leadership development activity, surfaced from the interviewees where there is an expectation that the employee *and* their supervisor should initiate one's development. Many of the participants saw their role as supervisors to help their employees identify and guide them towards targeted opportunities and look for ways to support either through funding or time. Supervisors also expected to see their employees take the initiative to better and develop themselves. These opportunities were most often co-constructed together through development conversations.

Participants acknowledged there was a possible sacrifice when investing time and money in employees' development. Two participants paraphrased a saying by Henry Ford: "There's only one thing worse than investing in people's growth and development and having them leave, the only thing worse is not investing in development and growth and having them stay"; and "…it's better to invest in your people and have them leave than not invest in your people and have them stay." Henry Ford's (of Ford Motor Company) saying was, "The only thing worse than training your employees and having them leave is not training them and having them stay" (Ford, n.d.). Participants acknowledged supervisors and institutions might not fully realize their investment in people, but it was still better than people not developing at all. One outlined their perceived duty, which had more emphasis on their direct report's development:

> I think as an administrator part of my job is keeping an eye on the environment in the sector and saying, hey, you know, have you noticed the following or have you seen this…position is coming down the pipeline. It hasn't been announced yet, but my counterpart's been talking about it for three months, so you should probably prepare for it.

Others were looking to balance developing their employees and benefitting the institution: "…when I see potential…when it's going to help the organization and the person…I try to make those alignments."

One of the most important characteristics for someone to be considered promotable was initiative. "I think there is meeting expectations, and then there's people who go above and beyond expectations and that's who I want." Many desired to see more initiative coming from their supervisors to lead the discussion and strategy surrounding succession planning and hoping their leadership will take action. "I think with this President that we have now, they came from an institution where I think they did [succession planning] quite a bit better than we did." Another spoke of continually looking for development opportunities within the organization: "…so that's another committee that we'll put this [person] on to give [them] that kind of experience. So, we're trying to find opportunities where they can get different experiences that will help [them] in the [next] role." The survey participants also expected that every employee should discuss their plans for growth with their supervisor.

The qualitative portion of the survey also pointed to this duality of responsibility, where the survey participants noted their institutions offer funding for employees to participate in a variety

of internal and external development and training opportunities, which was often repeated by the interview participants. The survey participants noted their expectation that employees would discuss their development plans with their supervisor to inform professional development decisions. The survey respondents who described their succession planning practices focused on the employee needing to be the one to initiate and identify their plans, rather than the institution identifying its needs and preparing its people for critical positions. One interviewee indicated they expected their direct reports to have the courage to work on their weaknesses, but also as a leader to identify those weaknesses to them:

> …it's important for me…to make sure the staff know if I feel there's gaps…and to work on those areas. Because those things can be learned…and I think that's…my responsibility as a leader to understand the people who report to me, what their strengths and weaknesses are and help them with their weaknesses if they want.

Alternately, one participant noted less instances of working for the good of individuals and organizations:

> There is a competition to credit, and a race to absolve guilt. This is just based on my experience and observations, but there are large egos in post-secondary education – people need to be right, not necessarily about find[ing] the best solution.

*Doing.*

"I think that we have to be less linear in our thinking of what it means to have career growth."

Learning by doing was another strong theme, and could be accomplished in a variety of ways like putting people into interim roles while a permanent replacement is found, which could lead to permanent advancement: "…twice now, once the person who was appointed as interim did win the competition." However, being in temporary roles may result in the employee realizing that role is not for them while still acting as a stretch opportunity for the individual. Supervisors can see if the people put into acting positions are ready to advance. Secondments were a similar opportunity to learn by doing; however, it did not seem to happen very often in the participants' experiences. Interviewees agreed there are benefits to the person in the acting or seconded role, the real reason for those opportunities was to meet an institutional need; sometimes participants felt ill-prepared for any acting or secondment role they took on.

Moving beyond one's specialty is important as one moves up the hierarchy, so acting and secondment positions can help individuals learn on the job and gain different perspectives. An interviewee recalled a time they took part in an inter-organizational secondment with another organization; they appreciated the different perspective gained from working externally to their organization temporarily.

One noted "basically anything where I was learning while applying is the best for me." Another noted leadership is a type of learning by doing as it often requires people to work outside their comfort zone. Participants also encouraged post-secondary leaders to move away from the idea that stretch assignments should only be about moving up the ladder. Another recalled a time where a direct report of theirs who did a lateral as opposed to an upward move within the organization: "A lateral move for [them], but re-energizing, and it's an opportunity to put [them] into something that I think [they'll] excel in." Others agreed with this idea of looking for ways

their employees could focus on betterment rather than just advancement - both benefiting the individual and the organization.

> So, whatever that looks like there's different opportunities come within the [institution] to lead a committee or be involved in something and if you have that opportunity to try to let somebody who you wouldn't normally have do that….constantly look for those opportunities to put people into those different positions and seeing whether they like it….

Another noted "…there's not one prescription for succession planning" and "it also depends on people's leadership styles and who's leading." Another suggested leadership development might look different depending on the recipient: "Depends on the individual…Some want more hand-holding, some want more time in the sandbox, so it's going to vary by the individual."

Learning by doing was a key concept for the participants, even if people focused on stretch opportunities just to better themselves, rather than to advance. But this also meant organizations were looking for people to learn from their mistakes: "And so they're making mistakes moving forward, and I'm okay with that…if they're making mistakes falling back, I'm unhappy with that." Another said, "…it's what you learn after you know it all is what really counts in life," which they attributed as a paraphrase of Mark Twain.

*Conducting performance management.*

"And so, what we're really trying to do a good job is being crystal clear about what's going well and what are the things we need to work and then what's our plan for you to work on it."

The above quote aligns with a previous section's theme of the co-construction of plans between employee and supervisor while answering the question of how they would describe their institution's plans for succession for their position level and higher. They expanded that they were planning for their vacancy and identifying those who might succeed them and using the performance appraisal system as a way to guide those discoveries. Many of the participants appeared to view the performance appraisal meeting as a minimal critical activity as part of succession planning, where frank conversations could be undertaken to discuss direct reports' plans:

> And I get that people don't like to do them or feel that it's difficult and it doesn't have to be. I mean, it's a conversation basically once a year. Not that you shouldn't be talking, of course, to your employees all the time, but…it shows respect to the employees, as well,…[when] you sit down and really hear from them. What are their interests; are they interested in moving along within [the institution]? Because sometimes we may lose people to other opportunities if they haven't had the opportunity here…

This is not to say that performance appraisals were regularly occurring across all participants' institutions:

"…we're not 100% great at getting the annual performance evaluations done."

“I can’t think of one department, honestly, that’s had all of their performance appraisals…done at the time they’re supposed to be done.”

"…we've got a performance evaluation system, and I certainly…pay attention to that, but it's [a] pretty light touch."

Two institutions had more systemized performance systems and these participants also seemed much more satisfied with their institution's overall succession planning processes. One institution tried to move away from scoring their employees, to a culture where "people were beginning to think about their succession at the [institution]." The shift from scoring occurred:

> …when we ran the analytics…five percent of our employee interactions were based on improving performance…or fixing. The other large group were doing great work, and our goal was to help them do better work. So, if we're talking about succession planning, we had to change the vocabulary…and the culture to a success/succession planning environment…so…we've done that and…we really embedded into [the] whole philosophy.

The second participant went into quite a bit of detail of their process:

> … [performance appraisals] have to be completed by the end of June. … it's a web-based system, so the employee goes on, they do a reflection on the year, talk about their goals for the next year, talk about the development they'd like to do, anything that they need from their manager that they don't currently feel they have and then the manager takes a look at that. Then… we meet, we discuss it, and then I go back, and I write up

> my side of it. So, do I have any other goals for them, do I support … the objectives they're [*sic*] put in place, do I have any other ideas about development for them or that kind of thing, and then we all sign it off and then what's great about that is one it makes you talk to people once a year and they're really good conversations. And it's a way, a place you can identify what people want to be doing and so if somebody signals… I'd really like to think about getting some skills in this area, or I would really like to look at that job over there, then it can get recorded there and then we can actually be more purposeful and help people achieve what they're thinking they want to do.

Others wanted to see more career development conversations as part of the performance appraisal system:

> I don't know how many supervisors are talking to their employees or … the people they work with …I think it should be part of every evaluation, but there's – I think there's lots of opportunity for informal evaluation, as well. Or just conversations and that's where I think it can happen, as well, because the, you know, the formal evaluations happen at year one and at year five and there's a big gap in the middle. So, I would like to see that happen more often formally to make sure it is happening…

> I want it to be more formal, right, I want it to be more open, and I want it to be more transparent… I know HR had a succession plan, but nobody knew what it was. The people that were in it didn't even know what it was… they didn't even know they were in it… so… where's the value in that?

One participant wanted clear pathways to facilitate learning by doing – "…when you go into those [interviews], you rely a lot on your past experiences in the department and in the institution…" and more performance appraisals consistently occurring at all levels of the organization with a connection to personal development:

> I would like to ensure that as many of our people within the institution able [*sic*] to do the jobs that they want to do. So, I think that if we follow the proper management techniques and HR practices, people should be aware of the things they need to work on and to be successful and to move to the next level. So, whether it's Vice President to President, Director to Vice President, Manager to Director, etc. … we create an institution where people would understand how to get to the next level and work on those skills to get that. That's what I'd like to … leave behind for the next person.

The participant who appeared to operate in the most formalized system amongst the participants still said:

> And we believe heavily in the democratization of leadership. And the democratization of leadership for us is there is no textbook answer. Leadership is driven from within. So, it begins with an internal exercise first and only the person who has those dreams and aspirations and strengths and weaknesses the way we define it. Only they can determine what kind of leadership path they want to take.

Two survey respondents mentioned in the qualitative section that their formal performance management tools formed part of their leadership development processes.

### *Conclusion.*

This section, which looked at the current practices and gaps surrounding succession planning and people development, demonstrated there is no uniformity in approaches or coordinated efforts. Earnest leaders are, however, looking to make a difference in their direct reports' careers, whether systems are in place or not in their institutions.

Individual leaders were doing their best to navigate their daily leadership practice, while attempting to meet desired organizational strategic directions. The actualized concept of a clearly defined pipeline at the organizational level, as at the individual level, was elusive, and again I wondered if a more malleable and flexible model might better inform succession planning and leadership development post-secondary practice.

## Beyond the institution.

### *Context and complexity.*

Context matters when it comes to succession planning according to the interviewees. It was more possible in non-union positions; however, some participants acknowledged recruiting for unionized positions, such as teaching positions, was increasingly a concern, especially as they looked at the age of their faculty. Some believed rural institutions, or those operating further away from large cities, needed to be more intentional about succession planning than institutions operating in larger cities. One participant who worked in a more urban setting than many others suggested succession planning is "less critical for the more population-dense areas, or the more institutional dense because we can share people." Indeed, they continued, "I don't know if

succession planning is a good idea for [my institution], but I think it's a fabulous idea for smaller institutions or for more isolated ones."

Some desired customized succession planning processes depending on the department and its needs and others believed succession planning for Presidential positions would look different than for the rest of the institution. One wondered if the smaller Canadian institutions should operate as its own ecosystem for succession planning, for recruiting and sharing development opportunities. Still, they wondered if even that network would be large enough to meet all the hiring demands for leaders.

Participants desired more conversation, structure, and standardization while allowing for customization acknowledging there might not be "one prescription for succession planning" for smaller institutions because of institutional complexities and the inability to fully "map out interactions or relationships."

As one participant put it:

> I know the whole institution and…because I sit at that table, we hear from managers as to 'Gee, this person is doing really well and, you know, we hope to keep them, and then we find ways hopefully of encouraging them to stay and maybe encouraging them to take certain courses or move along,' and so I think it's just because of our size.

Another spoke with pride as they compared their experience with a counterpart from another institution:

> …if I talk to…a dean at [Large institution], [they don't] know [their] people. Whereas I can tell you about every one of the…people in my school because we're small and I see them all the time, and I talk to them all the time…so, yeah, I think that's one of the nice things about a small [institution] is that you do have a closer…relationships [*sic*] with the people that you're working with.

And not only do leaders feel as though they know their employees better, but employees have more access to their leaders, even the executive. “I would kind of say that because you’re going to get noticed by more people…because it’s smaller, you just have more contact with, like the [Vice President] and people.”

Being more connected means it could be harder to hide one's mistakes or build an inauthentic reputation. Still, it suggests it is easier to shine in a smaller institution for those who are looking to develop and advance, or as one participant coined it: "it's easier to percolate to the top in a smaller institution." While this same person acknowledged it was not impossible for someone in a larger institution to be noticed, it could be harder than it is for those in a smaller organization:

> There could be people who are great workers and do a fabulous job. If nobody notices and you don't get a champion like…I had…who really became my mentor and champion. If you don't have that, I think it's harder. Not impossible, but it's harder to progress, and you're…just not seen in the same way. So, I think it's easier to be seen at a smaller institution.

As I explored this concept with an interview participant later, they said:

> …[Ken] Robinson talks about education as more of a, not as [an] industrial mindset where you have an assembly line and you kind of put people through, and you get the exact same…input. [They talk] about much more of an agricultural approach where you actually are planting seeds, and you have to care and nurture for those seeds in different ways, and what blossoms could be very different and unique and I think, that's how [they think] about our students in education, I think the same is true in leaders in education, there's a different kind of, less industrial, more organic approach to leadership development. And that's why I'm a big believer in this internal, kind of locus of good leadership development.

***Inter-organizational network.***

The idea of a social capital network extending beyond the institution itself emerged from the data. Another source of developing one's leadership was participating within a network of colleagues who held a similar type and position-level as themselves in other organizations. Through these networks, leaders could learn of other opportunities at other institutions if they were looking for a change, and keep an eye out for external opportunities for their employees if they knew they were looking to advance, but there were no available internal opportunities. As one noted,

> I think as an administrator part of my job is keeping an eye on the environment in the sector and saying ‘hey, you know, have noticed the following or have you seen this…position is coming down the pipeline. It hasn’t been announced yet, but my counterpart’s been talking about [it] for three months, so you should probably prepare for it’.

This same participant cautioned institutions to be aware of their institutional reputation within the ecosystem of post-secondary. Individuals are advised to be mindful of their internal status in the institution and institutions need to be aware of their reputation within the system if they want to recruit top candidates. Participants noted they particularly appreciated the support networks they were able to build within their province/territory. Through these networks, participants were sharing their challenges to look for solutions. One described their enduring appreciation of a leadership training relationship: "Yeah, that network is still there…now that I'm ten years in, it's more, you know…, just happy to see them, happy to see them succeed, you know, how's things…if I can do anything, give me a call." Individuals were also getting a sense of how various organizations operated through these networks:

> The big piece of the external [training] is being able to create community with people are beyond the borders of your organization. So, we tend to hear a lot about the value of meeting your peers from across the country or across North America.

Participants appreciated the networks they were able to connect with such as those who were in similar level positions, external leadership training opportunities such as CICan leadership institutes, the Chair Academy, and the Centre for Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD), any provincial/territorial networks that might exist in line with their discipline or position: “our region has a memorandum of understanding where we agree to work and collaborate together. I find these…discussions to be extremely beneficial.” One noted they relied heavily on their

informal network of Presidents. Some noted the higher up one went in an organization, the more isolating it could be, which is perhaps why networking was so crucial for the participants.

Networking was an appreciated by-product of many external development activities, including conferences. Other leadership training activities in which participants either participated in themselves or sent their direct reports to were Women in Academic leadership and Senior University Administrators Course (SUAC) training. One noted they opted not to do the CICan leadership training because it did not sound like a fit for them, suggesting a variety of networking options is preferable.

There was a disconnection of reputations between systems, however, where a couple who came from the K-12 system noted they felt like they had to work harder to build credibility and network within the post-secondary institution because of where they came from. While the social capital network appeared to continue beyond the organization, participants noted it became more fragile beyond post-secondary.

***Conclusion.***

This brief section extended the discussion beyond the institution to serve as a reminder that each post-secondary institution is part of a broader community and providing access to that community was a vital component for the participants, especially the higher they were in the institutional hierarchy. If extending the sense of community and the social capital network of relationships beyond the institution is vital for individuals to feel supported, then I also wonder what other benefits could arise from a more coordinated inter-institutional system where similar

outcomes are explored such as providing diverse opportunities for employees, for one to build one's depth of knowledge and practice, while also serving institutional needs. Charan et al.'s (2011) pipeline metaphor focused on the pipeline for the organization; however, as we see in Canada, pipelines are a mechanism to transport a commodity from one company to another. What if the concept of succession planning was extended beyond the post-secondary institution where more connections and a more robust tapestry of human resource talent was formed across the country?

# Chapter 5:

# Discussion Addressing Research Questions

# Leading to Emergent Model

Thus far in the study, I have explored the themes emerging from the qualitative interview data, with supporting background provided by the survey data. I have presented the emergent themes at the individual, organizational, and inter-organizational levels. The data intimated the desire for organic and natural conversations between employee and employer. The question arose in Chapter 4, whether the pipeline metaphor adequately served to inform succession planning and leadership development in rural Canadian post-secondary institutions. Therefore, the creation of a new succession planning model merits exploration to allow for co-constructed (between employee and supervisor) career pathways, which facilitates the navigation of the nuances found in each province and territory and the institutions in which they operate.

This chapter will address this study's research questions and suggest an emergent model of succession planning and leadership development in Canadian post-secondary institutions.

**Research Sub-Question 1**

*How do mid-to-senior leaders perceive the impact of their institution's (both past and present) succession planning on themselves individually, those lower in the hierarchy, and for the institution as a whole?*

**Individually.**

Many participants did not recognize there to be strategic succession planning frameworks at their institutions and they desired more structure, motivated by the aspiration to meet current institutional workforce needs. For many, there was the sense that while their career progression was not perfect, they had made do and figured it out. However, they wanted something better for their institution. For those who recounted positive career progression experiences, it was often

centred on individual interactions between themselves and supervisors or other leaders, rather than centred on a particular framework.

But, generally speaking, the impact of institutional succession planning practices was that many had a lack of a career plan and career progression training. This lacuna resulted in many participants looking back on their careers with a sense of surprise, but also gratitude. While surprise and gratitude are not necessarily negative, it does suggest there was a lack of agency amongst many of those participants, where they were somewhat reactive to their surroundings and postings as they arose, often relying on others' promptings and encouragement to apply. Overwhelmingly, many noted they needed to be flexible in their career expectations.

It bears remembering those who received the opportunity for executive coaching found it to be extremely formational and impactful to inform and refine their leadership skills. In the absence of an institutional succession planning framework and where there might not be career planning training, the impact of coaching appears to have played an important part in people’s leadership methodology. This may be because participants did not feel in control of their overall career, and coaching helped provide a feeling of control and empowerment.

**Lower in the organization.**

Many wanted a better and more coherent system for those who were lower in the organization. Those who saw the potential of performance evaluation mechanisms as a catalyst for career development conversations, but observed they were administered inconsistently or not at all, were concerned this showed a lack of respect for employees. The lack of career development conversations combined with, increasingly, relatively lower salaries compared to

other sectors seemed to create a vacuum for employees to look elsewhere for job opportunities, whether in post-secondary or otherwise. This sentiment juxtaposed with the reality that for some employees, the desire to stay within a particular rural or semi-rural region meant people were not able to advance their career because of limited options available in the area, whether in higher education or otherwise…resulting, for some, in a sense of malaise or lack of ambition in others.

There were some, however, who were satisfied with their institution's succession planning practices. One took pride in what they were able to do for their employees, while another, over the course of the interview itself, grew in their appreciation of their institution's succession planning practices and its impact on employees as they reflected on the number of personal, informal interactions, which took place. Although this particular participant still wished for more structure, their ability to sprinkle their daily work with many touchpoints with employees made them feel they had a positive impact on their employees.

Therefore, in the absence of formal or consistent succession planning practices, if there was at least regular conversation taking place between employees and supervisors, then the hope was this might be enough to help employees with their desired career progression.

**Institution as a whole.**

There are diverse succession planning practices found across all the institutions represented in this study, and hence diverse impacts on the organizations. Two interviewees recognized their institutions had just started on their journey of formalizing leadership development where critical leadership skills would inform future training. Another described the conversation with senior leaders where they built their definition of high performing employees and then identified

critical positions for the institution, top performers, and then methods to invest in those people. Although this process was not completed nor fully realized, the participant noted the leaders were struggling with those difficult conversations and defending who their high performers were based on metrics and evidence. So, while some identified cognitive dissonance when describing their institutions' lack of succession planning, merely starting on the path to develop succession planning strategy does not guarantee a lack of dissonance either.

Where there was high turnover within the institution, because of government cut-backs, wage freezes or other reasons, there was a less supportive environment because of a lack of time for leaders and managers to invest in their employees. I could not help but consider as I reviewed and interfaced with the data both during and after collection, whether a less supportive environment led to turnover.

The interplay between the individual and organizational leaders demonstrating initiative to develop human resources requires continuous assessment for strategic fit so the institution can convert both the employees' and leaders' efforts into sustainable capital (Collins & Kehoe, 2017) within the realm of human capital theory.

Some participants observed a lack of consistency across the institution and the lack of prioritization, whether in communication or formation of a structure by senior leaders, appears to result in inconsistencies. To fill the void of either communication or structure, many leaders appeared to take upon themselves in their daily leadership practice to do what they could to influence their corner of the organization, suggesting many organizations may have had pockets of exemplary practice in an uncoordinated fashion.

Those who saw intentional and strategic leadership development activities taking place in their institution were more satisfied with their institutions. Some of those activities included in-house leadership development training, and performance management processes that embedded development conversations where leaders were held accountable to undertake performance evaluations and embed development conversations in those performance discussions.

**Summary.**

In the absence of a framework and career progression training, the impact of institutions' succession planning was that individuals were reactive, flexible, and reliant on the insights of others on an ad hoc basis. Generally, this did not result in regret or bitterness, but surprise and gratitude, if not also a lack of agency. Those participants who experienced working within frameworks were able to see the connection between the organization's actions and values and found those experiences to be foundational for their development. For those lower in the hierarchy, there were inconsistent organizational initiatives, which some felt implied a lack of respect for employees. The lack of clear and defined career pathways, along with geographical limitations, generated a sense of career malaise for some. However, the lack of consistency was somewhat assuaged when regular conversation took place between employees and supervisors. At the organizational level, where there were more intentional and strategic succession planning practices being demonstrated, the satisfaction appeared to be higher.

**Research Sub-Question 2**

*What elements of their institutional succession planning have mid-to-senior leaders found most helpful, and why?*

**Present leaders.**

As participants reflected on how they might identify and work with high performing employees, or interact with their supervisors and other leaders, there was the common theme that leaders need to be physically present to observe and interact.

The desire of many participants for themselves, their leaders, and their aspiring leaders, was physical presence. Therefore, "absentee leadership" (Gregory, 2018, para.2) – where leaders are psychologically not present – might be a contributing factor to the state of succession planning and leadership development in institutions. While I do not suggest rural Canadian post-secondary institutions are rife with absentee leaders, it is possible the ever-broadening spectrum of environmental factors post-secondary leaders need to address creates the feeling of having an absentee leader regarding one's career. Although physical presence was explicitly noted as essential for succession planning and leadership development to work, the psychological presence of supervisors and senior leaders was pointed out as a thread that helps bring success.

Where physical presence is not possible, the concept of the distributed leadership model could help overcome the challenge for leaders. Gronn (2002) recommended the unit of analysis extend beyond the individual leader, to the concept of distributed leadership, which can increase organizational potential. Indeed, dissatisfaction with individualistic leadership is growing (Gronn, 2002) where there is an expectation of shared leadership, something which aligns well with the

collegial governance model in HE. Data from this study also supports the concept of distributed leadership, where participants called for a "cascading" of communication and the "democratization" of leadership. If leaders empower others to be their eyes and ears, in a transparent manner, with more people leading, then this may stem the tide against perceived psychological absenteeism.

The proposed model below demonstrates how succession planning and leadership development require 'all hands on deck' to develop and meet leadership needs. Jones and Harvey (2017) cautioned against adopting shared leadership towards multi-level leadership without ensuring there is an integrated system in place. The proposed model below supports this idea, as well.

**Conversational co-construction.**

Participants seemed to value any conversational guidance they received throughout their careers and many wanted to continue that in their leadership practice, whether it was encouraged by the institution or not. The guidance helped the participants open their eyes to their potential and place in post-secondary – whether in the organization or beyond. And this opening up of possibility seemed to embolden the participants to take more steps in their career path.

The emergent theme of conversational co-construction brings me back to the question of whether the pipeline metaphor is adequate to describe career development or succession planning. The intimation that a pipeline needs to be constructed before someone can enter the process does not align with the emergent theme of co-construction. These types of conversation, do, however, bring in the concept of social capital where post-secondary appears to value the

personal intersection and interactive networks (Day et al., 2014) created either formally or informally. As Oldroyd and Morris (2012) pointed out earlier in Chapter 2 and validated by this paper's findings, the relational linkages, not always visible to the organizational structure design, appear invaluable for the interviewees. There was an unwritten series of pathways that were not clear to the participants and they heavily relied on others to help point these out to them. The additional aspect of cultural capital also holds weight in the participants' lived experiences where they needed help to see how things worked in whatever institutional system they found themselves operating in.

Two other theories circling the participants' lived experience is the resource-based theory which helps explain the interrelations in effect in organizations (Barney et al., 2011) and upper echelons theory where we see that institutional leaders impacted their organizations by influencing the people within the organizations (Carpenter et al., 2004). Hambrick (2007) expanded on the upper echelons theory, where we might not understand complex circumstances explicitly, but they may be interpretable. This study's participants needed their colleagues to help them with this interpretation of the organizational interrelations and how those might inform their career trajectory.

Balancing leadership presence and capacity intersects upper echelons theory, which focuses on the higher levels of leadership (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), with human capital theory, which focuses on all levels of the organization (Becker, 1993). Many wanted to be present so they could impact the organization, and have a better sense of their employees to be on the lookout for talent, perhaps even to influence employees' decisions whether to invest in themselves or not. Without a presence, how would leaders know what learning opportunities they should expose

their employees to (Geletkanycz & Black, 2001) and how to enter into informed conversation? The participants also struggled with developing those social connections, which could benefit the organization (Bourdieu, 1986) by advancing their employees' and their social capital and extend the web of connection (Day et al., 2014).

### Shoulder tapping.

Related to conversational guidance is the concept of being tapped on the shoulder by either a supervisor or other leader to encourage the individual (the tappee) to consider alternative opportunities or pathways. The idea of tapping was explored in Chapter 4, where at least one participant observed shoulder tapping to happen more often in post-secondary than in their time in the K-12 system. Shoulder tapping was not looked on negatively by participants as they reflected on their careers. However, participants recognized the need to be careful with whom to align as a potential advocate or champion, in case that advocate was not helpful to one's reputation. But the concept of shoulder tapping, as the participants described it was not so much about aligning with an advocate, rather a mechanism to uncover their potential for other possibilities. McNair (2014) validated this in their study of first-time American community college presidents who found the participants did not initially intend to become college presidents. One of the main external catalysts for many of the participants to decide to seek a presidential position was through the suggestion from colleagues or other leaders, rather than formal mentors.

Shoulder tapping is not without its problems. As important as shoulder tapping was to the participants in their career trajectory, what is unknown is how many other people outside this

study never received the tap on the shoulder, yet may have still had potential. Many of the participants acknowledged most permanent positions were not directly appointed to individuals in their institutions; instead, most people had to go through a competition with a selection committee. While the goal of fairness in the competition was embedded in most of the participants' institutions selection processes, I suspect there are “lost leaders” (Morley, 2014, p.114) - not just in the gender spectrum, which Morley (2014) brought to light in their study of global academy leaders, but anyone who might add diversity to post-secondary leadership. By implementing institutional frameworks and accountabilities to facilitate those conversations, which are instrumental as career interventions, perhaps more will be made aware of their potential pathways rather than just those who happened to catch the eye of a particular leader. Coleman (2012) opined people tend to be drawn to those who are similar to them and cited studies from both Ireland and Australia where there is a tendency to select similar people to ourselves in all senior leader levels of education. With frameworks in place, perhaps the institutional perception will be that all people, as long as they are performing well, have opportunity. In one instance a participant described their institutional culture where people believed that only certain people would succeed despite the organization having selection committees presumably to build rigour and fairness into the process - it does not appear as though that was enough.

Reed (2015) suggested in their article that one of post-secondary leaders’ responsibilities is to look for leadership talent and tap people’s shoulders when appropriate and suggested there should be more shoulder tapping as some of the strongest performers may not think of themselves in that light nor step into opportunities without prompting. Some participants'

personal career stories validate Reed's (2015) observation. Reed (2015) also rightly warns managers to avoid merely encouraging those who are a version of themselves, which may be hard to overcome due to unconscious biases. While participants did not identify this as a problem explicitly within shoulder tapping, one noted their institution was attempting to improve its selections processes to be more inclusive, and provide training to remove discriminatory barriers. An HR professional interviewee identified diversity as a main issue for them, but more in the realm of seeking out training in this area.

The possible inherent bias involved in shoulder tapping was not considered a problem by participants, as it was not so much a method to intentionally or politically fill upcoming vacancies with those who act and look as they do. Instead, it was a touchpoint of encouragement or a form of mentorship 'light', perhaps in the spirit of servant leadership principles as identified in Chapter 1, specifically the empowerment and development of people and providing direction (van Dierendonck, 2011). If someone is not aware of the social undercurrents or the social capital network within the organization, or the skills needed for lateral or vertical positions, they may also not be aware of the pitfalls or opportunities within the organization. I wonder how those who unknowingly lack cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), particularly within a person's disposition, can get themselves ‘in front of' those leaders who identify and encourage potential leaders. One participant acknowledged that shoulder tapping was helpful for them to consider their potential and it was useful in crafting a career path. As a leader who may have more knowledge of the leadership competencies an institution may be looking for, a career path could start to be co-drafted with the shoulder tap being the impetus or motivator for the tappee. But the

question remains whether this is occurring equitably and consistently in Canadian post-secondary.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the perceived binary gender participation in this study is similar to another subset of Canadian post-secondary – research universities. Whether intentional or not, shoulder tapping could maintain the status quo of gender and ethnic representation in leadership, which may not set institutions up well to address cries for more diverse leadership.

**Performance management/development conversations.**

Regular and effective performance management conversations were not happening consistently across the participants' institutions. Where participants perceived these to be occurring, whether across the organization or isolated areas of the organization, the time for performance evaluation conversations was also a natural time to discuss career development with the employees.

Xu, Qin, Dust, and DiRenzo (2019) noted in their quantitative study that organizations should look to hire or recruit proactive individuals, and a supervisor's dynamic personality played an important role whether a direct report was also going to be proactive. Accordingly, supervisors should seek out opportunities to signal, hearkening back to Spence's (1973) signalling theory, desired and observed competencies and skillsets in their employees. This study's participants indicate the performance appraisal is one such venue in which that conversation can take place, albeit not the only one.

As noted in Chapter 2, part of succession planning's role is to address the areas of current

employees' development (Rothwell, 2011) and this study suggests where there are more systematic and enforced performance management systems, participants appeared more satisfied with their institution's succession planning. Indeed, Church, Rotolo, Ginther, and Levine (2015) found in their survey of top development companies, that the most cited reason for performance assessments was employee development. The authors further suggested performance appraisals should happen regularly to have relevancy for both employees and organizations.

The lack of career development plans for participants is reminiscent of Cembrowski and da Costa's (1998) study where they found Canadian HE managers were not provided with career planning guidance. While Cembrowski and da Costa's (1998) study focused on one institution over 20 years ago, I interviewed people across multiple provinces/territories, suggesting there continues to be a lack of career progression training within Canadian HE. Indeed, none of the participants discussed accessing career planning training throughout their career, nor did it come up as a desired element of succession planning; although, development conversations were appreciated when they occurred.

Development conversations provide an opportunity for employees and institutions to discuss aligned values, performance, and career paths. Mahmood, Mehreen, and Ali (2019) found performance appraisals in their quantitative study of Pakistani banks to have a mediating or positive impact on the relationship between career development and performance appraisals. Their study drew upon social exchange theory, which has a focus on mutually beneficial exchanges (Mahmood et al., 2019). Although shoulder tapping, a type of exchange, could be problematic in perpetuating biases, selection committees incorporated with diversity and

inclusion lenses can help offset this, but so can performance appraisals which incorporate development conversations and encourage more formalized exchanges.

Catropa and Andrews (2013) found in their survey of HE professionals, that almost half of the respondents decided to work in HE because it aligned with their sense of what they were meant to do. This idea of a calling aligns with one of the facets of the sense of coherence by Antonovsky (1987), where people are motivated by meaningfulness. Intriguingly, Mayer, Surtee, and Visser (2016) cited numerous studies that found women demonstrated a lower sense of coherence than men. However, the findings varied across the globe, intimating ethnicity or work environment could impact the level of coherence. Van der Westhuizen, de Beer, and Bekwa (2013) cited studies that found no differences between genders on the sense of coherence scale. Still, they cited a separate study which found differences across ethnicities. The bulk of the comments regarding altruism as a motivator for this study came from male participants, rather than female. The majority of this study's participants did not identify their ethnicity, so it is not possible to determine if that may have had an impact. Nonetheless, with male participants identifying altruism as a motivator more often than the female participants may have implications in HE practice on how to feed into various individuals' motivations to join HE, or to continue in HE in case people feel like imposters.

This concept of feeling like an imposter or a fraud was first identified as the imposter phenomenon by Clance and Imes (1978) in their study of high achieving women, where they felt they had fooled people into thinking they were intelligent. Over time, this is often referred to as imposter syndrome. Nearly 40 years later, Clance wished they and Imes had called it the

“imposter experience” (Anderson, 2016, para. 4) as these feelings are more a common human experience, rather than mental illness.

Again the law of requisite variety may help inform this theme where participants reacted to the variety of stimuli with a lack of intention, at least for the long-term, instead of seeking out or decisively responding to opportunities based on any plan or specific career aspiration. It is interesting that the participants appear to see other people or factors as the sources of intervention, rather than their inherent sense of agency. This possible lack of agency draws me to reflect on Mayer et al.’s (2016) study, where they studied sense of coherence in HE professionals in South Africa and their sense of mindfulness. Schmidt (2004) described mindfulness as combining a non-judgmental attitude with kindness and a lack of striving, which the interviewees often appeared to demonstrate when describing their career progression.

Becker (1993) believed people choose whether they will develop themselves as human capital - an interesting overlay of the participants' pride in having a unique career path. While the participants did not explicitly identify all the various factors which may have contributed to their 'one-of-a-kind' progress, one possible contributing factor for the participants is their level of personal education, which is positively related to career advancements and opportunities (Wayne et al., 1999) within human capital theory. Other contributing factors may be the participants' ability to navigate their various social and cultural connections and take advantage of opportunities to weave together their career story. So, while the participants appeared to reflect on their career with a sense of delight at the twists and turns, there is theory (particularly human, social, and cultural capital), which may explain these distinctive careers. And the cost of not

incorporating development conversations in performance appraisals could mean HE loses those who align and perform well, but are not given the tools to navigate a HE career effectively.

**Learning by doing.**

The participants identified leadership training opportunities (mostly external to the organization) such as CICan Leadership Institutes as leadership development activities that they or their employees undertook. However, the value most often realized in those types of training was the building of networks and connections with others. Many acknowledged their institutions had limited funding for these types of off-site learning opportunities. For those institutions that were big enough to have their own leadership training programs, there was satisfaction with them. However, most would not be in a position to develop an internal program given the funding constraints often mentioned by the participants. As discussed in Chapter 4, it is important to be cognizant of the post-secondary ecosystem in which institutions operate, not just for the individual to develop their career, but also for organizations to meet its needs. Therefore, it might be possible to see this ecosystem as a resource upon which institutions could come together to create leadership training modules, either co-delivered by institutions or allow for each institution to customize the modules so that each organization's leadership philosophy is embedded in the training.

There was openness by many of the participants to allow for learning on the job where mistakes could be made, as long as they were not repeated but learned from, and projects were available to stretch people’s leadership.

Lacerenza, Reyes, Marlow, Joseph, and Salas (2017) identified transfer as what the learner will do with what they learn in training, and the assessment of whether this transfer has occurred in a leader's behaviour is critical for successful leadership training. Lacerenza et al.'s (2017) concept of transfer drew me to the idea of embedding more rigour when institutions send or pay for their employees to go to leadership training. Perhaps supervisors should review with their employees some key takeaways from the training and co-constructively look for opportunities to transfer the learning to their daily work. This study's data do not demonstrate this type of review is happening. The participants valued learning on the job; therefore, it is not a far stretch to see supervisors assigning focused projects intertwined with desired outcomes from existing leadership training, wherever it may be held. Robust conversations could occur between the supervisor and employee, where they identify learnings and then match those to specific projects where the lessons can be applied. If institutions were to co-create in-house leadership modules, the application should not be forgotten and could facilitate the discovery of possible joint projects that each institution's leaders could join together on, making way for learning by doing opportunities and offering solutions to any number of common institutional challenges through increased cooperation.

This theme touches on both the proactive and reactive stances the participants found themselves living during their careers. The ability to transfer skills and knowledge to a variety of contexts aligns with the recommendation by Geletkanycz and Black (2001) as a way for organizations to invest in their employees, with a view to Hambrick and Mason's (1984) upper echelons theory. Not many of the participants viewed their exposure or accumulation of additional duties or responsibilities as particularly strategic of their organizations. Instead, it

occurred out of necessity to manage institutional resources. It also seemed as though strong performance was the precedent for being given more responsibility, rather than a mechanism to help a person grow. Regardless of the motivation, participants seemed to agree that having a variety of experiences was invaluable to their career progression.

People were expected to apply lessons learned from past positions, organizations, and sectors to their current role, and highlight those accomplishments gained from the stretch opportunities when they were applying for new positions. Increased exposure to a variety of projects and positions within the institution enables leaders to assess, in a more informed manner, the various responses the organization can take to maintain viability (Poulis & Poulis, 2016), demonstrating learning by doing. Providing exposure to a variety of scenarios reflects the application of the law of requisite variety in succession planning's subset of leadership development.

**Summary.**

The interview participants found the following elements the most helpful towards their institution’s succession planning system: leaders who were present, conversational co-construction of career plans, shoulder tapping, infusing career development conversations within performance management evaluations, and learning by doing opportunities. The bulk of these elements are centred on engaging in dialogue with a variety of people, not just one's supervisor. It is only the final element, where conversations result in discernable action. The act of conversing is central and essential for individuals and organizations to develop and embrace succession planning systems. It is the conversation that uncovers, inspires, and motivates.

**Research Sub-Question 3**

*How would mid-to-senior leaders like to see their institution's succession planning change and why?*

**Start talking.**

In many cases, participants merely wanted their leadership and institutions to start talking about succession planning. Additionally, there was a desire for more supervisors to be discussing career development with their direct reports, either through the performance appraisal system or elsewhere. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the importance of communication in succession planning is paramount, as found in Richards' (2009) study and Lee's (2018) recommendations. Building on this literature, my research suggests communication needs to take place at the individual, organizational, and inter-organizational level.

For some, the standard to be set seems quite low (i.e. just start talking), there was also a desire for a framework to facilitate the conversations and the performance appraisal mechanism is one such framework of accountability. However, there could be additional training for supervisors on how to have developing conversations with their direct reports, not only about performance management issues but also how to guide employees through career development conversations.

This lack of communication around succession planning aligns with Richards' (2009) conclusion in their study of American institutions that one of the most important considerations for succession planning to be effective is communication. As far back as the mid-1980s,

Friedman (1986) found that when CEOs spent time on succession planning, there were more positive outcomes resulting from the succession event. This suggests discussion and communication about institutional succession planning programs need to occur at the highest level of organizations, and is suggestive of the applicability of Hambrick and Mason's (1984) upper echelons theory, where managers and top management teams indeed influence organizational outcomes but also are a reflection of the organization (Lee, 2018). If the top management teams are not talking about succession planning, then lower-level managers' decisions, behaviours, and prioritizations will flow from that (Lee, 2018). If succession planning is not discussed, it will not be acted upon because there is nothing to direct the action. Lee (2018) referred to this as “trickling down” (p. 35). A participant referred to it as "cascading."

Signalling theory was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2 as part of the discussion of the upper echelons theory. Lee (2018) suggested these two theories could be considered at the same time together, and I suggest, based on the interview data, that signalling theory could extend to the topic of succession planning. Spence (1973) first proposed signalling theory, with an economic lens, and applied it to the job market where employers are encouraged to send signals to the job market about who and what the organization is to prospective applicants. Hence, there is a better probability of alignment between the organization, new employees, and building an organizational reputation. Similarly, whether intentional or not, the lack of congruence between communication and action in the participants' institutions signals that succession planning may not be a priority. Some employees may also extend that logic to presume they are not a priority, which was confirmed by at least one participant. This lack of follow-through may not be the signal that leaders want or intend to convey.

**Formalized processes…but not too much.**

Beyond the desire to start the conversation at all levels, there was also the desire for more formalized processes that allowed room for nuance, creativity, and agency of the employee and supervisor. Although this emergent theme focuses on the individual, this selectivity is reminiscent of the adaptive organization (Cannella & Lubatkin, 1993), as discussed in Chapter 2, where organizations opt to pivot in their hiring practices if organizational performance is poor. Similarly, these interviewees appear to adapt to job situations and select those that work best for them. Some chose to maintain a steady view of the jobs they were aiming for, reminiscent of Cannella and Lubatkin's (1993) description of the inertial view. Just as there is a difference of opinion on whether adaptive or inertial theories were predictive of organizational behaviour, this paper's data suggests both the adaptive and inertial individual are present in HE administration. And this is not limited to rural Canadian HE, as Grossman (2014) also found in their study of four American colleges, three of which identified as rural, that flexibility in the selection of leaders was important so as not to feel too restrictive.

The desire for change may more closely align with the adaptive theory than the inertial. However, those who were looking for change did not appear to be adapting to their context to improve performance. Instead, the desire for change seems to arise from a need to feel challenged and move forward with their personal growth (even though that might not translate into vertical growth in an organization). Ashby's law of requisite variety applied to the individual holds that a response may arise purely out of reactive behaviour outside of the person's cerebral control. Ashby identified three systems: "ordered…complex…chaotic" (Boisot & McKelvey, 2007, p. 3). This paper's data suggests some of the participants were looking to move away from a purely

ordered behaviour, embracing more complexity. Those who were looking for change were not looking to act in a chaotic system where there is no rhyme or reason. Instead, they were looking for a combination of, albeit self-declared, laws such as looking for change regularly, challenge, and somewhat of the unknown. Ashby questioned whether there is a normal distribution of people's behaviours in times of increasing complexity (Boisot & McKelvey, 2007). Not all the participants talked about their need for change, and those who did speak about it did so in different ways, suggesting people reacted differently depending on the stimuli. Therefore, Ashby's law of requisite variety appears to apply in this study from an organizational strategy context (which was explored in Chapter 2) and at the individual level. This duality of applications is not surprising given organizations are made up of humans who are often trying to make sense of their world. Given that participants were also demonstrating initiative to create change in their career, there is support for Poulis and Poulis' (2016) reminder that the role of human agency should not be forgotten.

**Stronger prioritization.**

Participants wanted more emphasis or prioritization on succession planning and leadership development. This goes beyond just the communication - if there were more communication, participants would not feel as though succession planning is languishing as much in their institutions. There was a lack of institutional agency in the form of budget constraints noted by some. Budget constraints can tempt leaders to stay within a single-loop learning paradigm where existing behaviours prevail (Azadegan et al., 2019). And yet, there is research which demonstrates linkages between strong succession planning practices and organizational/individual performance (Mahmood et al., 2019). Intriguingly, many participants

knew their organizations needed succession planning, but as I reflect on the full body of interviews, I believe this perceived need was to help meet upcoming retirements. Perhaps this reason alone, with budget constraints in view, is not a strong enough value proposition for why more is needed.

One example where there was extremely low prioritization was with knowledge management. Knowledge management is a discipline that Kransdorff (2012) asserted is about which managers know very little. This study's findings support that conclusion. There is also alignment with literature to include the word wisdom (as one participant used) in this discussion (Kransdorff, 2012). Kransdorff (2012) suggested reasons for the general lack of knowledge management include lack of time, presence of ego, and inability to know how to apply predecessors' learnings. Participants did not seem to be able to speak to the reasons, only the recognition that a lack of knowledge management is an institutional vulnerability. The implications of this gap in practice may include the suffering of such institutional outcomes like student persistence and graduation rates, never mind the increased frustration for those who succeed various managers and leaders as they attempt to rapidly learn the past strategies and tactics utilized by predecessors (Shadow, 2018). Knowledge management is an example where simply filling vacancies may not be enough of a motivator…but focusing on institutional outcomes such as graduation rates, and more diversity and inclusion may help drive the motivation beyond simply meeting this year's budget.

The desire for stronger prioritization for succession planning from this study's participants unfortunately demonstrates that there is still a gap in Canadian HE more than 20 years since Cembrowski and da Costa's 1998 study of one Western Canadian institution. Indeed, this paper

suggests the lacuna of effective succession planning is broadly experienced across the country. I also question whether this lacuna will hinder small Canadian institutions' ability to compete in an already competitive landscape, which has presumably gone into overdrive with the occurrence of the novel coronavirus COVID-19.

**Definition of leadership philosophy.**

Defining the institution's leadership philosophy was an integral, initial part of those institutions which had started or already implemented some succession planning practices. When it did not appear participants' institutions had defined their desired leadership competencies, there was a vacuum that may have opened the door to less than value-driven leadership.

As institutions draft their philosophy on leadership, the previously discussed distributed model of leadership could also inform this process. How the philosophy is lived out will also be impacted if the institution subscribes to a shared leadership model where multiple levels of the institution are required to embody the institutional leadership philosophy. As HE mostly operates within a shared governance model, the process of composing the philosophy could well be served by utilizing the shared governance model to assist in the community consultation of how the institution wants its leaders to lead, and help with more 'buy-in' of the philosophy.

The wishful thinking concept mentioned in Chapter 4 alludes to the inertial organization concept, where as long as nothing goes terribly wrong, then there is no need to invest resources or change practice. The adaptive and inertial organization concepts are one possible explanation for why organizations hire internally or externally. Once an institution knows where it wants to go and under what kind of leadership, there could be a more focused and productive discussion

about succession planning and how to get the right people in the right places. Participants acknowledged succession planning would also need to be made a priority with funding and time by creating space to regularly talk about it, rather than just a one-time event. Participants were also looking how they would define a high performer, identify and develop the promotable talent, and how the institution would hire to its leadership vision.

One institution was just embarking on creating more formal succession planning processes and systems. One of the first steps towards this was to require their senior leaders to draft a listing of leadership competencies for which the institution is looking. Capuano et al. (2008) called for institutions to be clear regarding what their desired leadership competencies were, as a starting point for succession planning, although HE seems reticent to quantify what it is looking for in future leaders (Mackey, 2008). Grossman (2014) suggested that without defined desired leadership competencies, performance evaluations can be more subjective in nature than objective and can leave various people behind. One possible starting point for institutions to consider when drafting its desired leadership competencies is the American Association of Community Colleges' (2018) list of: organizational culture, governance frameworks and policies and infrastructure, student success, relationships, data analysis, advocacy, communication, collaboration, and alignment of personal traits with the institutional agenda. These can be taken into account and customized for what best fits with the institution's values and mission.

Leadership, however, will need to look deeper within than merely desired competencies as it develops its philosophy and consider such concepts as authentic leadership where a leader's influence extends beyond financial success to societal issues (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004), which aligns well with many post-secondary mandates. Authentic

leadership requires deep work where leaders match their actions with their values and beliefs (Avolio et al., 2004). Avolio et al. (2004) suggested a framework where leaders demonstrate hope, trust, and optimism resulting in followers showing such things as commitment and engagement. Kouzes and Posner (2019) recommend five practices in their conceptualization of transformational leadership with a focus on relationship, which also aligns well with this study's participants' desire for present and engaged leaders. Leaders are encouraged to model behaviour to earn respect, encourage a unified vision, step out of the status quo, empower others to work together, and encourage people's hearts in their leadership style (Kouzes & Posner, 2019). Therefore, the call for institutions to develop their leadership philosophy also extends to leaders developing their personal leadership philosophy.

**Mentoring.**

In this study, there were some indicators that participants would like to see more formal mentoring take place.

The call to action from this study is to build out the mentoring opportunities from within post-secondary itself. How these programs are created may differ for each institution to allow for the defined institutional leadership philosophy to inform the mentoring that takes place. The attractiveness of mentoring meshes nicely with the distributed leadership model where many people can participate, which may then help spread the work across the institution. Thinking back to the spiral of theories discussed in Chapter 2 and depicted again in Figure 5.1, we can imagine mentoring working together with other concepts, such as distributed leadership and upper echelons theory, where senior leaders impact how the organization moves forward.

Mentoring is not new to higher education. The concept was popularized for higher education teaching practice in the 1980s (Salinas, Riley, Camacho, & Floyd, 2020), and yet, it has not developed well in a cohesive manner for institutional leaders (Mackey, 2008). My study finds similar to Merriam in 1983, that while mentoring is impactful, it is not fully actualized for leaders in higher education, still nearly 40 years later. Connolly (2018) found in their literature review there was a gap in formal staff mentoring research in HE and also found there was little formal staff mentoring at an Ireland institution, but when a formal mentoring scheme was initiated at the institution, levels of females at full professorial levels outpaced the national average. More wide-spread mentoring could help with diversity in HE (Salinas et al., 2020; Harris & Lee, 2019). A wide variety of HE subsets have benefitted from mentoring over the years. Faculty-student mentoring has been shown to be impactful for international graduate students (Yang, Orrego Dunleavy, & Phillips, 2016) and doctoral students and their faculty, (Lynam, 2020). Faculty-faculty mentoring has benefited such groups as Asian-American females (Hsieh & Nguyen, 2020) and male Latino faculty (Salinas et al., 2020). However, based on my review of literature, formalized programs within higher education appear to be slow in coming for burgeoning HE administration leaders (i.e. outside of faculty), which begs the question if there is really an institutional desire for mentoring. Perhaps, an institutional value such as diversity and inclusion is needed to drive more formalized mentoring before mentoring is genuinely embedded in everyday institutional leadership succession planning systems.

Bărbuceanu (2019) describes mentoring as a developing and perpetuating process where the mentor guides and inspires less experienced individuals, who can then mentor others. Bărbuceanu (2019) further suggests mentoring is essential for females in higher education and

could help develop diversity in HE leaders. Farley (2014) found in their qualitative interview-based study of female university administrators in four different countries that "informal, multiple, mixed gender mentoring" (p. 2) was the most effective for women. Grotrian-Ryan (2015) found in their mixed-methods study the most beneficial element of mentoring to be role modelling, with counselling and friendship the least effective. Mentoring is a component of experiential leadership development (Grotrian-Ryan, 2015), which provides both psychosocial and career development utility for the mentee. Watson (2008) does note, however, in their study of female senior administrators in health care and higher education, that it was informal mentoring that benefitted the participants in their administrative climb, rather than formal, and mentoring had more impact in the earlier stages of their career, and networking took precedence later on in terms of impact. Therefore, timing and form may need to be considered for institutions contemplating the implementation of mentoring programs.

**Coaching.**

As discussed in Chapter 4, coaching was very impactful for those few participants who had received it - more impactful than mentoring. And yet, coaching does not seem to occur as much. This study does not explicitly address why that may be. However, many participants spoke to their funding challenges, which could impact available resources for coaching. I have looked into funding an executive coach for some of my direct reports, and I know I do not have the funds to procure a coach. Similar to mentoring, coaching is a utilized concept in HE for students (Henningsson & Fredriksson, 2018) and faculty (Lofthouse, 2019). Bertrand (2019) found that because there is such a low priority for leadership development, HE is not likely to initiate “meaningful, robust” (p. 112) coaching activities. However, this should not discourage HE to

forego coaching altogether. The emergent model described below allows for many touchpoints where formal and informal institutional leaders are encouraged to model leadership behaviour to others in a variety of settings.

Coaching can help individuals become more adaptive and has recently received more attention in industry (Meyer, Carr, Foster, Hui, & Sue-Chan, 2018). Different forms of coaching have also been found to have different results. Hui, Sue-Chan, and Wood (2013) proposed two types of coaching: guidance and facilitation. Guidance sees the coach as the role model operating in a directive way with clear expectations and feedback, while facilitated coaching finds the 'coachee' reflecting and self-developing desired responses (Hui et al., 2013). Meyer et al. (2018) found facilitation coaching can enhance people's feelings of control and ability to manage work demands. While participants were not explicit in what kind of coaching they received, when reviewing their comments, they likely experienced facilitation coaching rather than guidance.

Simon, Dole, and Farragher (2019) suggested coaching could be helpful for Australian public school principals as they transition into leadership roles, in an environment where leadership programmes are considered inadequate. And coaching is growing in HE, particularly for educators (Lofthouse, 2019). Going back to the earlier call in this paper for leaders simply to start talking, providing some preliminary training on how to coach others, may well be used to spread organically amongst developing leaders. The benefit of this 'start small' approach could be the start of a groundswell of appreciation for coaching where leaders are developed and distributed through all levels of the organization. Some possible 'starter' coaching questions could be "where are you now? What do you want? Lastly, how will you get there?" (Henningsson & Fredricksson, 2018, p. 8). Starting small can also help individuals learn which coaching style

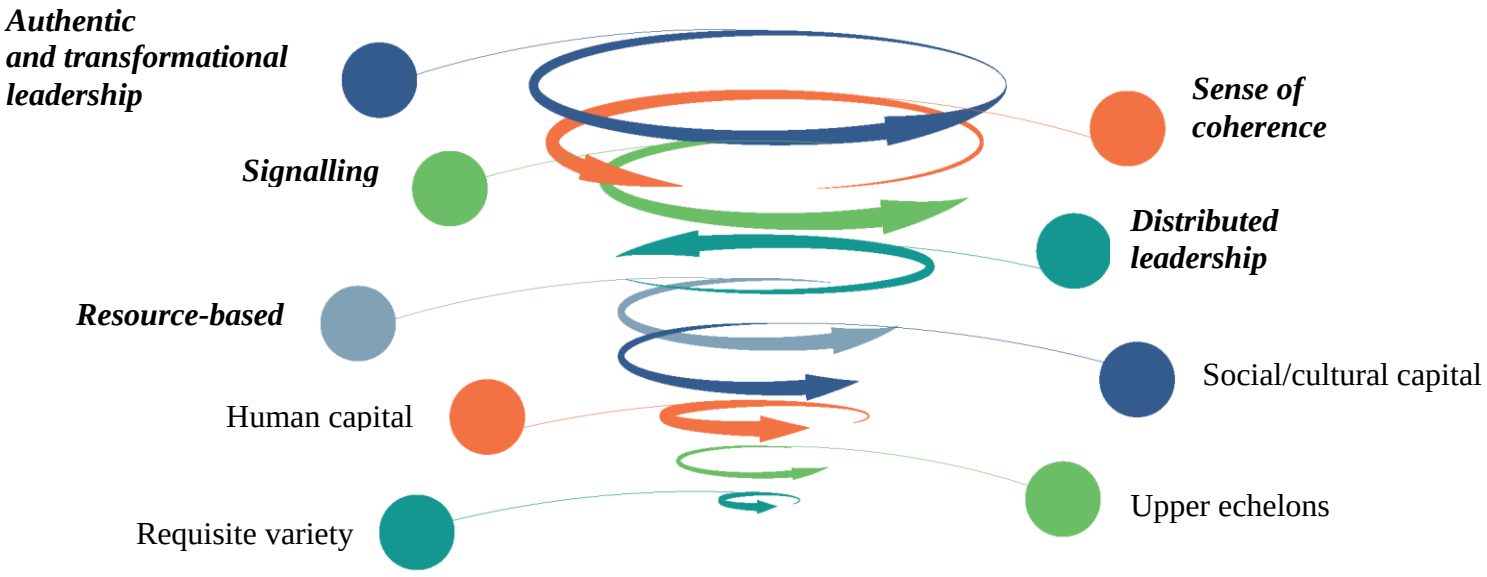
works best in certain situations as Meyer et al. (2018) suggested one coaching style may not be optimal for and in all. Berg and Karlsen (2012) noted that peer coaching is growing in management and this style could help mediate the need for leadership development in HE with limited resources. Bertrand (2019) found in their qualitative survey of academic deans in the United States that "empathy, self-awareness, and… self-care" (p. 111) were most developed as a result of the participants' use of executive coaching. Accordingly, when combined with an institution which outlines its leadership philosophy, coaching may help leaders develop desired leadership competencies in tandem with institutional outcomes.

Both mentoring and coaching actualize the upper echelons theory, where institutional outcomes reflect top management (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Organizational outcomes arise from lower-level managers' actions, and if mentees are influenced by formal or informal coaching internal to the organization, the reflection of leadership is seen in outcomes. Bertrand (2019) found with executive coaching there to be a development of administrator self-awareness, the managers receiving executive coaching can critically self-analyze their impact on the organization, particularly if empathy increases during the process. There were a couple of examples where one participant paid for one of their newer direct reports to have professional coaching because they were struggling with a few aspects of leadership. Another participant noted their institution provided access for them and others to an executive coach, which had a lasting impact. These two examples of institutions providing executive coaching are an exemplar of the resource-based theory, where institutions valued the development of their internal human capital resources (Kor, 2003).

**Summary.**

Figure 5.1 below revisits the spiralling theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2. As I progressed through the data analysis and discussion in relation to the research questions I found that instead of the resource-dependence theory informing the research, resource-based theory had more impact in developing the grounded theory model, therefore it has replaced resource-dependence in this chapter's figure. Requisite variety continued to underpin the model (although, the role of human agency could also be used to augment this theory (Poulis & Poulis, 2016)), as did upper echelons, human capital and social and cultural capital theories. Other theories which helped inform the model (and have been added in bold italics in Figure 5.1) are distributed leadership, signalling, sense of coherence, and authentic and transformational leadership.

***Figure 5.1: Spiralling theoretical framework revisited***



As participants discussed what they wanted to see change, there was a building upon the conversational elements found most helpful from the previous research question, in that participants often simply wanted their institutions to start talking more about succession planning. Dialogue is the critical initial and ongoing ingredient, which must be present. As institutions begin to hone their succession planning strategy, this may become dialectical as they debate what may be best for the institution, particularly within a shared governance setting where there may be differences of opinion. Flowing from this conversation, participants wanted to see a variety of formalized processes such as in-house leadership training, mentoring, and coaching demonstrating stronger prioritization, as long as it was malleable enough to work within a variety of contexts. The importance of each institution identifying its leadership philosophy was added as vital to any changes which are to take place.

**Main Research Question Leading to a Model**

> *How can the lived succession planning experiences of rural Canadian HE institutional administrators provide insights into how institutions might improve their succession planning practices?*

As the emergent themes were explored in Chapter 4, along with re-framing the findings by referring to my initial and subsequent literature review for the three sub-research questions discussion in Chapter 5 above, I can move into the consideration of an emergent model for succession planning and its sub-topic of leadership development in rural Canadian post-secondary institutions. It was during my fourth interview, in particular, where the metaphor of fibre or fabric was mentioned, and I started to explore this in future interviews and data analysis.

This picture then evolved into an emergent model, which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Before I explore the model, I will revisit the context within which the participants and respondents work and operate.

**Small instead of rural?**

As I first started reaching out to the 74 institutions within the population, an interesting issue arose where some institutions questioned why they were considered rural. Admittedly, the inclusion criteria were such that a broad spectrum of institutional size and location was considered in the definition of a rural institution for purposes of this study. It appeared, from the invitation phase alone, there are differing interpretations of what rurality means. Although, all participants worked in ‘rural’ institutions as defined in this study’s inclusion criteria, one participant confirmed the possible issue with rurality when they referenced a different part of the country which they perceived to have much lower level of services and framed that area as actually rural.

While there may be differing interpretations of rurality, institutional and community identity appear to be wrapped up in the idea of a rural or small institution. One participant spoke about how the institution had "carved off" a few leaders where there was no alignment or a lack of understanding on how smaller institutions operate, i.e. much more of a hands-on approach than that of a larger institution. The small institutional identity entwines with the earlier conversation about people needing to be able to do a variety of tasks and take on a variety of responsibilities in a smaller institution.

More participants identified as working in a small institution rather than merely a rural institution, so often the conversation turned to what it was like to work, lead, develop leaders, and plan for succession in a small institution. One participant noted that while they worked in an urban setting, it was not as urban as another much larger city close by. So, even within the idea of urban, size is relative.

***The uniqueness of small.***

Perhaps the strongest unique characteristic of being small that emerged was the level of interconnectedness. With fewer people working at the institution, people know more people from different areas of the institution and have more opportunities to connect, encourage, and upon whom to rely.

There was a theme that explicitly arose from one participant regarding the greater importance of authentic reputation in a smaller institution. However, given the emphasis many of the interviewees placed on the importance of connection and building one's brand, the importance of a trustworthy reputation appears to apply to several participants' lived experiences. Fundamentally, the participant who started their career in a small institution and was now working in the largest of any of the included institutions, observed it was easier to create a persona in larger institutions that might not be backed up by reality or actual performance. Additionally, they felt it was easier to cover up mistakes in a larger institution in terms of protecting one's reputation. Building one's brand or perceived reputation in a smaller institution had to be based on one's actual performance or behaviour. A subsequent literature review shows that research is light on how one builds their reputation in a small HE institution as opposed to a

larger one, although Faria and Machado (2019) found in their case study of a small Portuguese business that there is closer proximity between managers and employees so that one's behaviour is more closely observed. Validating this concept, one participant shared that they believed they were able to build their credibility through their leadership style and ability to move files enough that they were directly appointed (that is, not participating in a competition) for their last three positions.

### *Beyond the limitations of small.*

As attractive as working in a smaller centre may be for some people, with the ability to connect more deeply with others in a smaller institution, there were limitations. The limited number of positions and talent available because of the size of the institution was a reality for some. The lack of people and positions means it is difficult to show employees a pathway they could work their way through.

Because there might be one position that requires a certain set of skills in an institution, it is difficult to train up within for specific positions, so there may not be a replacement for an anticipated vacancy. Any limitations encountered as a small institution could potentially be offset by remembering that the institution is part of a larger ecosystem. If the pride in institutional interconnectedness is extended and actualized in the sector, more opportunities may arise for employees to take on. However, this possibly assumes all institutions are developing their people to the same desired outcomes, which may not be the case. To presume institutions could share their human resources, rather than also focusing on developing their internal employees, may uncover such challenges as value misalignment, employee un-preparedness, and lack-of-fit.

Extending one's social capital network beyond the confines of the institution through conferences, external training, or simply meetings with similar level colleagues, can help build perspective for people as they consider their cultural capital and whether it worthwhile to develop if it aligns with institutions beyond their own.

**Problem with the pipeline.**

As I interacted with the participants and then continued with my iterative data analysis for this informed grounded theory study, I often questioned if the pipeline analogy made the most sense to inform current and future succession planning practices for rural or small Canadian post-secondary. There was a desire amongst the participants for succession planning and development to be based in conversation that feels natural and unforced. I have already mentioned that the picture of fabric or tapestry came to mind early on in the interviews.

The pipeline, which intimates a pre-determined pathway as set out by the organization, seems to fly in the face of the overwhelming desire by the participants to have an organic, co-constructed, and fluid succession planning strategy including how leaders are developed.

**Weaving together – the model.**

Through the emergent themes and conversations with the interview participants, the picture materialized in my mind of supervisors and employees sitting down, having a conversation focused on building something – perhaps a tapestry. The vision of people conversing while they wove or knitted something together continued to seem to capture the desire for connection, while still being productive. What was discussed between the supervisor and their employee needed to

connect with the organization's goals and development of leaders, while weaving in the networks and opportunities across the institutions within the sector. Weaving people's, organization's, and the post-secondary sector's tapestry allows for individual and institutional creativity, where threads or fibres of various colours (or personalities or cultures, etc.) and thicknesses (some having more impact than others) can flow to and fro to allow for the distinct and unique identity of each person and organization to form a metaphor. The metaphor for the practitioner (employee, supervisor) can be used to inform how to conceptualize or plan one's career development.

As has already been uncovered in the emergent themes, there appears a need for a model for practitioners to inform succession planning and leadership development at the individual, organizational, and inter-organizational levels. Accordingly, this model proposes three tapestries focused on each of these levels, building on the metaphor above. However, they are not and should not be woven in isolation to one another, nor to the other tapestries which are being created by others at similar levels. I explored my ontological perspective in Chapter 2, where I expanded on Moses and Knutsen's (2012) advocacy for the wearing of multiple ontological perspectives or jackets. Similarly, I advocate for institutions to weave multiple tapestries to build up or add texture to *successful succession management.* This model is intended to help practitioners as employees and leaders conceptualize how a person could strategically build connections and competencies to prepare for future positions – all the while taking into account what organizations will need from its leaders in the future.

***Individual.***

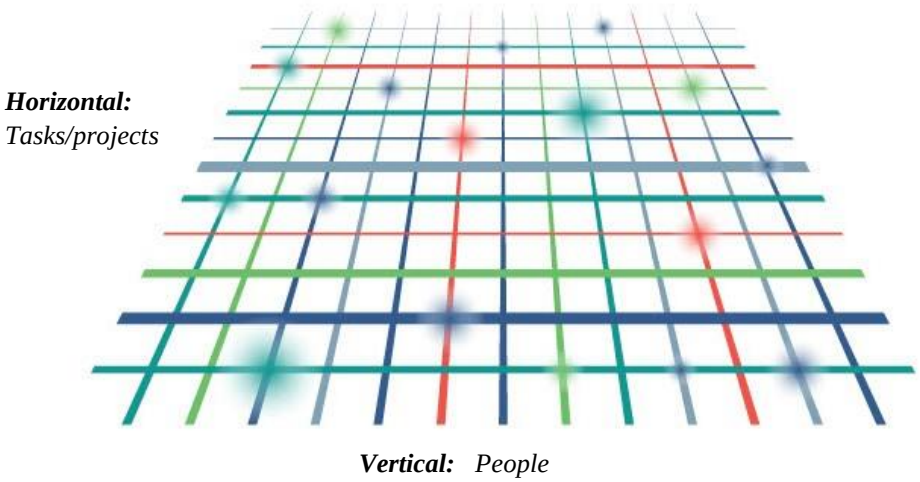
Before an employee and their supervisor engage in career development conversations, it may be useful to have a conceptualization of how the employee can build their unique career tapestry through human connection and tasks. In Figure 5.2, we see how individuals might develop their leadership competencies by doing specific tasks to allow for learning on the job (horizontal axis) – each horizontal thread representing any given task, project, or ongoing committee work. The varying widths of the threads or horizontal lines denote that some tasks may be larger or more involved than others. As the employee undertakes various tasks or engages in projects or committees, they may intersect with multiple people across the organization at a variety of levels in the hierarchy (vertical axis). Each vertical line represents an individual within the organization. Perhaps an employee participates in a meeting where there is a Director from the human resources department, another higher in the hierarchy- perhaps a Vice President, a fellow manager who specializes in governance, and the Director of Teaching & Learning. This one meeting allows for all of those people to observe the employee, and vice versa. The employee has the opportunity to learn, ideally, by doing a stretch project, and solicit feedback, should the relationship warrant it, from those in the meeting. While it appears as though each horizontal task intersects with each vertical line (person), the radial gradients at certain intersections depict the actual connection of the employee with various people while participating in a task. As an employee embarks upon a task or thinks about who might be the best people to join, the employee should consider all of the possibilities. Including such factors as who might have the desired competencies or connections that not only could help complete the task but also how might the employee expand their network and thereby their social capital and skillsets. The

size variation in the radial gradation in Figure 5.2 at intersections suggests that some connections may be more impactful than others as touchpoints occur. As the employee reflects on those learnings, they may then seek to discuss with their supervisor. The supervisor may also have heard feedback and is more aware of other growth opportunities within the organization because of their position. They then suggest another possibility, perhaps in the form of joining a particular committee that either builds on the employee's existing strengths or provides the prospect of filling in current competency gaps, thereby encouraging the transfer of learning.

While the employee is filling out their career tapestry by seeking out personal interactions and a variety of tasks, so too is the supervisor weaving their own tapestry in consultation with their superior with the same conceptualization in mind:  broadening strategic intersections with key people and tasks with the view to fill any leadership competency gaps in preparation for future positions. Tapestry building on tapestry.

Although the weaving layer in Figure 5.2 portrays straight lines for simplicity's sake, this is not to suggest that crafting one's career and developing one's leadership practice is straightforward and clear. This study's data indicates one's career pathway can take unexpected turns. However, a model that encourages an employee to consider who and what could be beneficial elements as one builds their career could be helpful.

***Figure 5.2: Weaving layer***




***Organizational.***

Figure 5.2 can also be used to depict a conceptualization of how an organization can view its succession planning. Once again, each vertical line represents each person/position in the organization, and every horizontal line depicts the various projects that are taking place. Of course, for an organizational perspective there will be more tasks and more people (i.e. more lines) than an individual might need to consider. Still, the number of lines could become quite large if thinking of an entire organization. The model could also be scaled down for supervisors to consider various functional areas for which they are responsible. As organizational leaders identify which positions most critically need more people to be ready to fill vacancies should they arise, leaders should review the various projects employees have participated in and where they have made the most significant impact (the radial gradients). As supervisors consider who might be possible candidates for upcoming vacancies, and where those vacancies might be and what competencies are needed, a supervisor can bring their survey of organizational needs into

their discussions with their employees. Not only is the employee considering how they can expand or ‘textualize' their career tapestry, but also the supervisor is thinking of what the organization needs and what current and upcoming projects may help develop their employees, but also serve the organization.

Not only is the supervisor building their own career tapestry at the individual level, but they are also helping form the plan at the organizational level for a variety of tasks that all employees could undertake so that all functional areas are building out a cache of competent leaders at every level, and then also seeing what other developments or networking opportunities are available for themselves personally and for their direct reports and their organizations: a constant weaving in and out through all of the levels and functional areas.

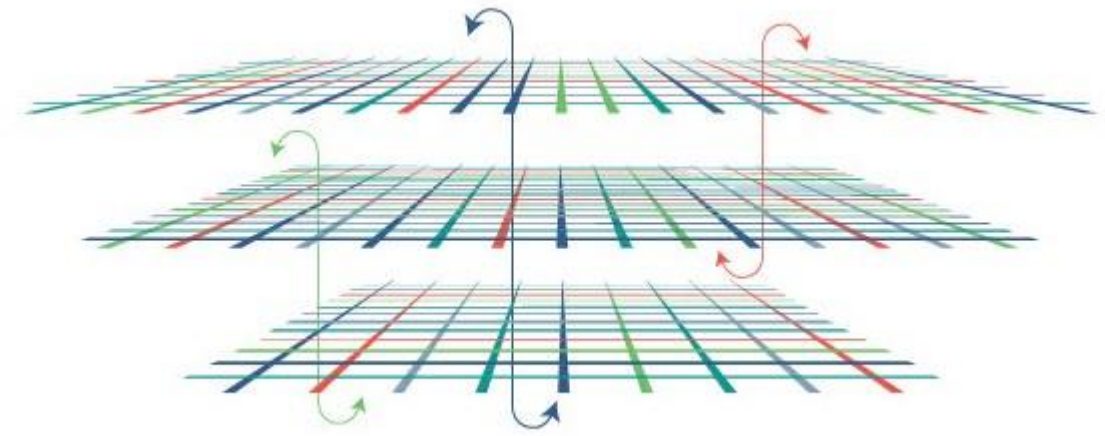
***Inter-organizational.***

Once again, the basic weaving together model found Figure 5.2 can be used to conceptualize the inter-organizational blending of tasks and people/positions. There would obviously be more people to consider across a wide range of post-secondary institutions, but there may be fewer projects or initiatives taking place across organizations, depending on need and resources. This picture could apply to inter- or intra-provincial organizations, rural institutions, members of CICan, or other subsets of inter-organizational networks within Canadian post-secondary. Some projects may have more impact on organizations, or some people may have more impact on projects, which again are depicted through the various radial gradients. As employees and supervisors build their individual and organizational weaves, they can also consider what possible projects or people within an inter-organizational weave might serve both an individual's career development and an organization's succession planning or other needs.

***Weaving together.***

As individuals and organizations weave their career and organizational tapestries, there can (and should) be a constant looking to and from all of the various tapestries to see how each can contribute or connect. If we overlay the three levels of tapestries on top of each other at eye-level, we see in Figure 5.3 all three levels of weaving are linked and should be considered as each level is weaving simultaneously. There may be learnings gained from an inter-organizational network the employee is engaged in that could inform a particular task the employee is working at their institution. A supervisor may learn of a potential vacancy in their organization or inter-organizational network that could be a good fit for their employee's career plan. An organization may interact with a particular person through an inter-organizational articulation meeting, displaying many competencies and skillsets that the organization has not successfully developed within its human resource capital. Weaving in and out is constantly occurring at the individual (bottom level in Figure 5.3), organizational (middle level), and inter-organizational levels (top level) as people build their career tapestry and institutions consider how they develop and build competent people at all levels of the organization (Titzer et al., 2014). The vertical arrows flowing between all three levels in the figure below aim to depict the connecting which may occur between them through the interplay of tasks (horizontal axes in each weave) and people (vertical axes).

***Figure 5.3 Weaving together model***



This simple weave model addresses the call for a succession planning framework that allows for the uniqueness of people and organizations. The weaving metaphor helps practitioners remember the desire of this study's participants to incorporate developmental and robust conversation between present leaders and employees while looking for ways for people to learn by doing and making connections with people in a variety of settings and with some organizational networks. This model challenges the singular pipeline metaphor and encourages post-secondary institutions to embrace their desire for connection and co-construction of people's careers and institutional succession planning strategies. This model also provides a conceptualization that can incorporate many of Barton's (2019) suggested succession planning best practices, such as making succession planning a priority with a deepened approach to address all organizational levels, while still allowing for flexibility, differentiation, transparency, and repeatability. Furthermore, this model applies Rothwell's (2005) suggested succession planning essentials such as sharing people across divisions, considering lateral and vertical career

pathways, and providing frequent opportunities for employees to take on new challenges. Additionally, this model also encourages organizations to think of those outside of the institution in response to current and future trends or demands for more diversity and equity in institutional leadership. Chapter 6 will explore the implications for practice arising from this research and resulting weaving together model.

I have shown through the above discussion that the participants' lived experiences touched on a variety of theories such as upper echelons, human, social, and cultural capital, resource-based theory, and the law of requisite of variety, which validates the interrelations of these theories as discussed in Chapter 2. But, the interrelations also speak to the applicability of these theories in conjunction with the above model, as well as additional concepts explored in this chapter such as knowledge management, distributed leadership theory, and signalling theory among others (see Figure 5.1).

# Chapter 6:

# Conclusion

When I first chose to explore the topic of succession planning in post-secondary education, specifically in Canadian rural institutions, I questioned why succession planning, as I had seen in industry, was not post-secondary praxis. I was familiar with the terminology of viewing succession planning as a pipeline, and I was intrigued to see how, if at all, this might become more pervasive in post-secondary institutions, especially with the acknowledged need for HE leaders. While I was not entirely sure what I would uncover through this study, I think I was expecting to hear from the interview participants that they wanted more systemic tools such as the building of databases to record people's skillsets, matrices matching people's skills sets to all job descriptions, and more inter-departmental secondment opportunities, as these are often the kinds of tools that one reads about for large corporations. But even as I considered these complex and somewhat impersonal tools, I questioned whether this approach was feasible, not only from a resource-intensive perspective but even if these would 'mesh' with a rural post-secondary culture.

What surprised me as I engaged with the interviewees and the data was the fundamental desire for succession planning and leadership development to start and end with conversation and the need for human connection through it all. Perhaps this should not be so surprising given that Moses and Knutsen (2012), as discussed in Chapter 3, explained that the goal of social science research is to uncover patterns, rather than predict results. If I think back to my career progression in post-secondary, I can recall the feeling of being taken aback when I heard through the ‘grapevine’ (early in my time in HE) that my supervisor had told an entire committee they thought I would at least work my way to being a Dean and yet the supervisor had never verbalized that to me. I wonder how my career progression might have looked differently had they or I initiated more conversations to co-construct my career pathway plan.

**Implications of this Research for Practice**

The beauty, and perhaps surprise, of this study's call to begin and continue talking with employees, supervisors, leadership teams, and inter-institutional networks about succession planning is in its simplicity. Some participants did not know where to start with the topic of succession planning, and it seemed insurmountable. Simply starting a conversation can foster diverse ideas and identify those achievable practices in the short- and long-term to help institutions build a cadre of high performers at each leadership level. In the ontological spirit of social constructivism, succession planning realities can come to fruition. For those institutions which are further along in the development of their succession planning systems, they can continue to keep the conversation building so that continuous improvement may occur.

Of course, this study's call to action is not merely about engaging in dialogue, but also to back up those conversations with action. Those actions have the potential to start small at the individual level using the weaving model as a way to consider how to build depth and breadth to individuals' leadership and technical skill sets, and expose as many people within the organization as possible to build one's brand or reputation within the organization. The exposure to multiple functions, levels, and people not only helps them develop their reputability, but also provides additional touchpoints for the employee to learn through interacting with others. The employee's career goals inform which skillsets are most essential to develop. The supervisor, who presumably will have spent more time weaving their career tapestry, can provide perspective on the key skill sets.

The weaving together model found in Figure 5.3 provides a first step for leaders to conceptualize that both people (within immediate teams, throughout the organization, and beyond) and tasks must be woven together when engaging in succession planning conversations. With this model in mind senior leadership teams can then help guide the institution by formulating and communicating the leadership philosophy so that employees are clear to what standard of leadership they should strive. The study also showed that participants want the room to move or customize within the succession planning system. Therefore, once the leadership philosophy is developed leadership should identify the minimum level of leadership practice the institution needs to have to operate within its strategic directions and values, while still allowing for diverse personal leadership styles and approaches.

From there, senior leaders can facilitate the foundational individual conversations by holding supervisors accountable to demonstrate those conversations are taking place, whether that be through the performance appraisal process or at other times throughout the year. That is, build a system whereby managers understand they will be held accountable to have development conversations with their teams, primarily utilizing existing performance appraisal systems, which many institutions already have. In times of limited resources, institutions should take stock of any existing resources which can be leveraged. For those leaders who feel ill-equipped to have difficult or developmental conversations regarding an employee's performance or realistic career goals or career planning conversations, institutions should look for ways to train their leaders. This training may or may not require a myriad of resources as some participants noted that there is value in having internal leaders deliver the training.

Leadership should then also consider what additional mechanisms it may want to explore for people development internally such as mentoring and coaching, particularly peer-to-peer coaching when considering existing human capital and the need to help people build social and cultural capital.

The immediate and rewarding impact of this study is that many participants responded to the call to action to reflect on their personal and institutional practice. One participant found the interview helpful to make time to reflect on their practice and identify some good practices that were already in place. Yet another committed during the interview to bring this very topic to their senior leadership team meeting the next week.

I hope that not only the participants will continue to advocate for increased prioritization on the topic in their respective institutions, but that I will also be an effective advocate throughout my institutional and inter-institutional networks. I plan to share my findings with the senior leadership team, including introducing them to the weaving together model and walk them through a working meeting to define our leadership philosophy, and do a review of our leadership positions which may be at risk of not being fulfilled. In turn, this could facilitate targeted conversations with my colleagues to discuss how there may be others within the organization who, if encouraged to engage more broadly across hierarchical levels and functional areas, may develop their leadership practice and more clearly lay out their career pathway.

**Implications for Leadership Development**

Institutional leadership development can be informed by the institutional leadership philosophy, which could lean on such frameworks as authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004) or

transformational leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2019) as discussed in Chapter 5. These leadership theories are critical to inform how effective various development conversations can be. If institutional leadership says that developing their leaders is important but does not follow-through this could result in loss of employee commitment and engagement, and thereby a loss of human capital. Similarly, Kouzes and Posner's (2019 five practices of leadership can help invite employees to trust their supervisors enough to bring vulnerability to development conversations.

Beyond deep introspection in one's leadership approach to development conversations, institutions can also consider how they might want to design any leadership development programs (be it internal or inter-organizational). Dopson et al. (2019) found in their literature review of recent HE leadership development programs that customizable, yet focused learning and the involvement of transformational leadership where leaders are encouraged to become more self-aware are best practices to consider. Ruben, De Lisi, and Gigliotti (2018) noted that leadership itself is co-constructed by those who lead and those follow, therefore there needs to be intentional engagement between leaders and followers, which the weaving together model also recommends, in any kind of leadership development. Additionally, Ruben et al. (2018) recommended to base any kind of leadership development on the foundation of continuous and iterative learning where leaders create their personal leadership philosophy and then reflect on their success and failure to meet meaningful goals. The weaving together model can also assist to frame those reflections as leaders consider which tasks and people were involved and where growth could occur. Any kind of leadership development programs or activities should also apply to the context in which they operate. This paper notes that Canada is still grappling with reconciliation and gender diversity in leadership. Accordingly, leadership development will need

to be inclusive and inviting of different ways of knowing and being and people are encouraged to think deeply about who they are and how that might impact their leadership style.

**Personal Development**

I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on my leadership practice as I conducted the research and analyzed the data. I found that I was able to speak into various conversations in my workplace sharing aspects of my findings with my colleagues. As I made my way through this project, I changed how I approached my performance appraisal meetings with my direct reports in that I encouraged them to share their short-term and long-term career goals and I shared some career and development suggestions that they may not have otherwise thought of. As a result of this I have had a few of my direct reports thank me for taking the time to do this.

Beyond my daily leadership practice and my intention to work with my leadership colleagues to explore the weaving together model, I aim to share my findings at a national conference, such as Colleges and Institutes Canada's annual conference and publish my work in at least one journal such as the *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* or the *Journal of Higher Education Policy*. Beyond that I also hope to expand my reach by offering to present my findings to leaders at other organizations in the form of workshops, which I will first pilot with my current institutional colleagues in the near future.

**Limitations**

As with many research studies my study had some limitations which arose from my research design. As I was building this study's population count, I may not have captured all the

French-speaking institutional locations as I was often using Google Translate to review institutional websites to uncover in which locations institutions were operating. Further to my lack of fluent French language proficiency, I was limited only to English speaking institutions in the sample. With these two limitations, a possible area for further study can be considered to focus on French-speaking rural post-secondary institutions to consider what, if any, nuanced or additional challenges may arise in that subset of Canadian post-secondary. One possibility might be to present my findings to those from French-speaking institutions and, through focus group discussions, test the conclusions in these different contexts.

As I reflect on this study, and, in particular its methodology and methods, I am pleased with the choices made to use an informed grounded theory approach as I was able to answer the research question of how Canadian HE administrators' lived experiences could improve succession planning practices by adding to the body of knowledge with a developing weaving model, while still integrating with existing literature. I was disappointed with the lack of quantitative data as I would have liked to provide more background context regarding the participating institutions and explore any differing or similar perceptions between human resource practitioners and other institutional leaders regarding succession planning practices. But, the qualitative was rich enough to explore and address the research questions.

**Areas for Further Study**

Beyond the study design limitations, I also experienced a wide range of interpretations of required levels of approval for research in the ethical approval processes. This incongruity was a fascinating challenge to be faced with as I reached out to 74 institutions across all 13 Canadian

provinces and territories. The variation in ethical processes could be a topic of further exploration. Another interesting item that presented itself during my initial stage of inviting institutions to participate was where a select few institutions questioned why they were identified as rural institutions in my inclusion criteria. The concept of rural identity and its impact on higher education and beyond may also warrant further investigation.

Another topic I did not explore deeply due to the scope of this study is the diversity of leadership. As discussed in Chapter 4 and 5, the issue did not often surface in conversation, which could intimate that more research is needed on the topic as it may not necessarily be top of mind for post-secondary. Washington (2016, as cited in Barton, 2019) recommended in their conference paper that succession planning should incorporate processes and opportunities that can lead to a diverse pool of high performing individuals. Further investigation on the topic of succession planning and leadership development could benefit from a critical realist lens which could aim to measure why diversity and inclusion is so elusive in Canadian HE and understand the causal patterns. Added to that, the concept of cultural capital may be an important factor to explore in such a diverse country as Canada, that is also still struggling to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 calls to action (2015) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' (2019) calls for justice.

An additional area of focused research which could also promote diversity in leadership is the investigation of how peer-to-peer executive coaching could work in a small institution with limited resources. This final area is of particular interest for me and may guide me in future research of my own.

## Conclusion

I am exceedingly grateful to the interview participants who shared their lived experiences of their careers and leadership practice. I learned much as we dialogued, and I continue to reflect on their stories as I seek ways continually to hone my leadership practice. As I write this chapter, our world is in the throes of fighting the novel coronavirus – COVID-19. The participants' call for supportive and present dialogue amongst employees and supervisors as we navigate a changing landscape of needed post-secondary leadership accrues more poignancy in these isolating and disorienting times. In Canada, as COVID-19 grew in its urgency, society was encouraged to practice *social distancing*. However, after a few weeks, the directive switched to practice *physical distancing with social connection*. I cannot help but also think that this direction applies to the smaller post-secondary institutions where normal operations were already dispersed throughout multiple communities and campuses before the pandemic. The centrality of human connection cannot and should not be lost whether in times of pandemic or in terms of building a cadre of high performing individuals at every institutional level who are ready to meet whatever challenges, global or otherwise, they and their institutions may face.

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## APPENDIX A: Interview participant information sheet

### 1. Title of Study

An Exploration of the Leadership Pipeline in Rural Canadian Public Post-Secondary Institutions

### 2. Version Number and Date

Version 1.0 Interview May 2019

### 3. Invitation Paragraph

I am a doctoral student at the University of Liverpool. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. I would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

### 4. What is the purpose of the study?

As a Dean working in a rural Canadian college, I am interested to learn more, through my doctoral thesis, about succession planning in rural Canadian higher education.

The purpose of this research is to contribute to rural Canadian higher education (HE) institutional leaders' understanding of the benefits of and practice of succession planning answering the research question: How can the lived succession planning experiences of rural Canadian HE institutional administrators provide insights into how institutions can improve their succession planning practices?

**5. Why have I been invited to take part?**

There are two components to this research project:

1. A questionnaire which will survey human resource departments in rural Canadian institutions to provide a background context to the research question by providing a sense of such things like institutional size, employee demographics, and sources of filling vacant leadership positions.
2. Semi-structured interviews of mid-to-senior level administrators (Department/School Chair (or equivalent) or higher) from rural Canadian institutions.

You are invited to take part in the interview portion of this study as you are a mid-to-senior level administrator employed at one of the member institutions of Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) which operates at least one campus or centre in a rural centre. The rural centre definition is based on Statistics Canada's definition of a small population centre of up to 30,000.

There are 74 other institutions besides yours which are included in this population. The goal is to have at least one interviewee from each of Canada's 13 provinces and territories so as to have a pan-Canadian representation of leaders.

**6. Do I have to take part?**

Your participation as an interviewee is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time, without explanation, and without incurring a disadvantage.

**7. What will happen if I take part?**

I will be conducting all of the interviews as a doctoral student researcher with the University of Liverpool.

Your institution's President has given me permission to invite, via email, mid-to-senior level administrators to take part in a semi-structured interview. This interview will be conducted using the Skype platform and is anticipated to take no more than an hour. Participants will be selected by the researcher with the view to have a pan-Canadian representation from all interviewees. If you are selected to be an interviewee, you will not need to prepare ahead although I will send you some initial guiding questions ahead of the mutually scheduled interview in case you would like to read/think ahead of the interview date and time. You will have up to five days to review these guiding questions, this participation information sheet, and informed consent form and ask any follow-up questions prior to providing your informed consent.

With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded, or video recorded if internet connection allows, for transcription purposes.

To ensure your privacy, it is recommended that you be in a private room where you cannot be overheard or overlooked when the Skype interview is conducted. For example, do not participate in the interview in an open-plan office.

You will also be given the opportunity one time to validate the preliminary findings or themes post-interview once I have analysed the data. Additionally, at the same time, you will be given the opportunity to review the findings to ensure you feel that your data has been sufficiently anonymized. This opportunity is anticipated to occur up to 6 months subsequent to the interview.

**8. How will my data be used?**

The University of Liverpool processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".

Under United Kingdom data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. The Thesis Supervisor acts as the Data Processor for this study, and any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to Dr. Anne Qualter at A.Qualter@liverpool.ac.uk .

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below.

| | |
|---|---|
| How will my data be collected? | Interview data will be collected through audio and/or video recordings using Skype technology. |
| How will my data be stored? | Interview recordings will be available to both yourself and me for 30 days in our individual Skype accounts before they are automatically deleted. I will download this recording and store it on my password-protected personal computer.<br><br>These recordings will be transcribed by myself and transcripts will also be stored on my password-protected personal computer. |

| | |
|---|---|
| How long will my data be stored for? | 5 years for the purpose of supporting or validating the project's observations, findings or outputs, |
| What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data? | Password protection of both computer and files. |
| Will my data be anonymised? | Interview transcripts will not include your personal or institution's name. |
| How will my data be used? | Interview data will be used to generate themes to address the research question. |
| Who will have access to my data? | I, Tiffany Snauwaert, the student researcher. |
| Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future? | No. |
| How will my data be destroyed? | Once 5 years has passed after my thesis is fully approved, all interview recordings and transcripts will be deleted from my personal computer. |

**9. Expenses and / or payments**

Not available, although you will be offered a copy of the thesis upon completion.

**10. Are there any risks in taking part?**

Although there are no anticipated perceived disadvantages or risks involved with participating in this study, should you experience any discomfort or disadvantage as part of the research this should be made known to me immediately.

**11. Are there any benefits in taking part?**

You will be offered a copy of the thesis upon completion at your request for you to review and consider for possible recommendations for succession planning.

**12. What will happen to the results of the study?**

The results of the study will be made available to all participants (both questionnaire and interviews) at their request, as well as posted on the University of Liverpool's thesis database. Additionally, results may be shared, pending interest, at a Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) workshop, as well as at my current place of work in British Columbia: a rural Canadian institution, and through publishing a report.

You and your institution will not be identifiable from the results and all identifying factors will be anonymized.

**13. What happens if we discuss sensitive or distressing topics during the interview?**

During the interview, there could be potential disclosure of personal and sensitive information. If you experience any emotional distress during the interview, you can abstain from answering any questions you may be uncomfortable with. Additionally, you can opt to pause the interview to provide time for you to consider whether you want continue or withdraw from the study.

**14. What will happen if I want to stop taking part?**

You can withdraw your participation in the study at any time, without explanation.

Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used for the interview, if you are happy for this to be done. Otherwise you may request that the results are destroyed and no further use is made of them.

If you want to withdraw your information subsequent to completing the interview, please contact myself, Tiffany Snauwaert (student researcher) at tiffany.snauwaert@online.liverpool.ac.uk.

**15. What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Dr. Anne Qualter, thesis supervisor at 011-44-7970-247387 and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Office at ethics@liv.ac.uk. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 011-44-303-123-1113.

**16. Who can I contact if I have further questions?**

Student researcher: Tiffany Snauwaert tiffany.snauwaert@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Thesis supervisor: Dr. Anne Qualter at A.Qualter@liverpool.ac.uk .

## APPENDIX B: Interview participant consent form


**Committee on Research Ethics**

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Title of Research Project:** An Exploration of the Leadership Pipeline in Rural Canadian Public Post-Secondary Institutions

**Researcher(s): Tiffany Snauwaert**

| | Please initial box |
|---|---|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated May 2019 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. | ☐ |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. | ☐ |
| 3. I understand that, under the United Kingdom Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish. | ☐ |
| 4. The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy. | ☐ |
| 5. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name and institution's name will not be linked with the research materials, and I and my institution will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. I will have the opportunity, if I wish, to review the preliminary findings to ensure that I and my institution are not identifiable. | ☐ |

6. I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded (or video recorded if internet connection allows) and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes: To be transcribed and analysed. ☐

7. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

| Participant Name | Date | Signature |
|---|---|---|
| Tiffany Snauwaert | | |
| Name of Person taking consent | Date | Signature |
| Tiffany Snauwaert | | |
| Researcher | Date | Signature |

**Principal Investigator:**
Name: Dr. Anne Qualter
Work Address:
Centre for Higher Education Studies
School of Histories, Languages and Cultures
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
12 Abercromby Square
University of Liverpool
Liverpool
L69 7WZ
Work Telephone: 07970 247387
Work Email A.Qualter@liverpool.ac.uk

**Student Researcher:**
Name: Tiffany Snauwaert
Work Address: 301 Frank Beinder Way, Castlegar, BC, V1N 4J2 Canada
Work Telephone: 250-365-1268
Work Email: tiffany.snauwaert@online.liverpool.ac.uk

## Appendix C: University of Liverpool Ethics Approval


| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dear Tiffany Snauwaert, | | | | |
| I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below. | | | | |
| Sub-Committee: | | EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) | | |
| Review type: | | Expedited | | |
| School: | | Lifelong Learning | | |
| Title: | | An Exploration of the Leadership Pipeline in Rural Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions | | |
| First Reviewer: | | Dr. Morag A. Gray; | | |
| Second Reviewer: | | Dr. Jan Smith, Dr. Hazel Brown | | |
| Other members of the Committee | | Dr. Lucilla Crosta, Dr. Janet Hanson, Dr. Arwen Raddon | | |
| Date of Approval: | | 21st March 2019 | | |
| The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions: | | | | |
| **Conditions** | | | | |
| 1 | Mandatory | M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor. | | |

This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta, Chair, EdD. VPREC

## APPENDIX D: Initial recruitment email

Date

Address

Dear President XX:

I am writing to seek your permission to undertake research with your institution regarding succession planning and leadership development in rural Canadian colleges, institutes, and cégeps. I am the sole researcher for this study, and am doing this research for the purposes of obtaining my Doctorate of Education (EdD) degree through the University of Liverpool (United Kingdom). I have obtained all necessary approvals from the University of Liverpool's Research Ethics Board, and I am in compliance with all of their requirements to conduct this study.

I am doing my EdD program part-time while working full-time as the Dean for Community Education & Workplace Training, School of Business, and School of Environment & Geomatics at Selkirk College in BC. As a result of my current role at the College I am interested to learn more, through my doctoral thesis, about succession planning in a rural Canadian context. As an EdD candidate with the University of Liverpool, I am compelled to strictly adhere to all ethical policies and standards of the University.

This proposed study seeks to contribute to rural Canadian higher educational institutional leaders' understanding of succession planning and leadership development, particularly in light of increased workforce competition and higher education corporatization and their impact on rural higher education. This research has the potential to help Canadian rural institutions identify and consider for implementation possible succession planning strategies and tactics for their particular rural context. I hope to generate opportunities for rural Canadian post-secondary leaders to reflect on how they can develop their leadership pipeline in a sustainable manner.

I will be seeking to undertake this research with 75 colleges, institutes, and cégeps in all 13 of Canada's provinces and territories. The research will be conducted used mixed methods. One component is an online questionnaire that will be sent (pending your Presidential approval) to each institution's human resources department. For the second component, I hope to interview one mid-to-senior level administrator (Department/School Chair (or equivalent) or higher) from each province to at least a total of thirteen interviews.

If you grant me permission, I will fully comply with the University of Liverpool's research ethical conduct policies. I do not anticipate that the research will be onerous for your institution. I anticipate the online questionnaire to take no more than 20 minutes for one of your human resource representatives (or

delegate) to answer such things as institutional size, types of succession planning practices, and sources of filling vacant leadership positions.

If you do consent to your institution participating in this study by responding affirmatively to this email, I will use your institution's website to identify an individual from your human resources department and email them to invite them to participate in the online questionnaire. Alternatively, you could also grant approval by forwarding this email request to your recommended person in the human resources department.

I anticipate each semi-structured interview to last approximately one hour and I plan to conduct all interviews using Skype. Through the interview I hope to learn more about the interviewee's lived experience with succession planning at their current and/or past institutions. Additionally, I plan to give each interviewee the opportunity to validate via email the preliminary findings or themes post-interview once I have analyzed the data. At this time also, the interviewees will be able to review the preliminary findings to ensure they feel that their personal and institutional data has been sufficiently anonymized. There should not be any costs incurred by either your human resources department, nor any interviewee from your institution.

For the interview component if you provide your consent, I will use your institution's website to identify mid-to-senior level administrators and I will email them to invite them to express interest in participating in a semi-structured interview. Alternatively, you could grant your approval and choose to forward my email to your mid-to-senior level administrators for their consideration.

For your perusal, I attach copies of the Participation Information Sheet for both the questionnaire and interview components, which will be sent to all potential participants. Additionally, I attach a copy of the Informed Consent form, which will also be sent to each potential participant. These forms should satisfy confidentiality and anonymity requirements, along with informed consent.

Neither participants nor institutions will be identifiable in the final research report, all comments will be anonymized, and contextual information that may inadvertently identify participants and institutions will be changed. Participants will not be identified as being at any particular institution, and the institutions participating in the project will not be identified in the research.

My EdD supervisor is Dr. Anne Qualter, and she will closely monitor the progress of the research and ensure that I adhere to all ethical requirements. I am the only person who will have access to the interview and questionnaire data.

If you agree to allow the research to be conducted in your institution, and should you have any concerns about the way in which the research is conducted, you can contact myself at tiffany.snauwaert@online.liverpool.ac.uk or Dr. Anne Qualter at A.Qualter@liverpool.ac.uk .

I hope that you agree to allow this research to take place at your institution. I think the research has the potential to inform Senior Executives and Human Resources Departments at rural post-secondary institutions across Canada regarding succession planning and leadership development strategies and practices. I would be pleased to discuss this research in more depth with you and answer any questions that you may have.

If you do consent to this research at your institution, please either respond in the affirmative or forward this email to your desired designate from your human resources department, as well as your middle-to-senior managers, and copy me on the same.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Snauwaert
EdD Candidate
University of Liverpool

Encl. 3

## APPENDIX E: Questionnaire

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**Thank you for your participation. Please refer to the Participation Information Sheet that was emailed to you for your information before completing the consent form on the next page**

**For optimal viewing, please use a desktop or tablet computer.**

**This survey will remain open until October 25, 2019.**

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Participant Consent Form

**Please read the following Consent Form. If you answer "No", you are declining to take part in this survey and you will be directed to the end of this survey.**

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated February 2019 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

3. I understand that, under the United Kingdom Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

4. I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymized responses. I understand that my name and institution's name will not be linked with the research materials, and I and my institution will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research. I will have the opportunity, if I wish, to review the preliminary findings to ensure that I and my institution are not identifiable.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

- ◌ Yes
- ◌ No

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Approximately how many student full-time equivalents (FTEs) does your institution serve?

Approximately how many staff and faculty FTEs does your institution have?

How would you rate the adequacy of your institution's succession planning practices to help your institution be prepared for future employee turnover?

| Inadequate | Poor | Neutral | Good | Excellent |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Š | Š | Š | Š | Š |

Please indicate approximately what percentage (between 0 and 100) of people currently in each level of management has been internally recruited over the past 5 years:

| | |
|---|---|
| Middle managers (e.g. School Chairs, Associate Deans, Associate Directors, Manager) | |
| Senior leadership (e.g. Deans, Directors, Associate Vice-Presidents) | |
| Executive leadership (e.g. Vice-Presidents not including President/CEO) | |
| President | |

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

For which of the following employee groups does your institution currently have leadership development opportunities and/or succession planning processes in place?

| | Leadership development opportunities | Succession planning practices |
|---|---|---|
| Support staff | ☐ | ☐ |
| Unionized instructional staff | ☐ | ☐ |
| Non-unionized instructional staff | ☐ | ☐ |
| Non-unionized staff | ☐ | ☐ |
| Managers | ☐ | ☐ |
| Executive leadership not including President | ☐ | ☐ |
| President | ☐ | ☐ |

Please describe what leadership development opportunities are available for employees

(Note: There are no word or character limitations in this question - so your answer can be as brief or as long as you wish)

Please describe your institution's succession planning practices

(Note: There are no word or character limitations in this question - so your answer can be as brief or as long as you wish)

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* The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy.

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

If you answered yes to receiving a copy of the thesis report, please email Tiffany Snauwaert at tiffany.snauwaert@online.liverpool.ac.uk to request a copy.

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

**Thank you for taking the time participate in this survey!**

**APPENDIX F: Interviewee review letter**
*(Note: Letter adapted from Rompre (2018, p. 148))*

Dear [insert name],

I hope this finds you well and safe during these extraordinary COVID-19 times.

I am writing to update you on my research, *Weaving Together: An Exploration of Succession Planning in Rural Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions*, and to ask for one more favour. As we discussed during the interview you did with me a number of months ago, I wonder if you might comment on the emergent themes to ensure that I am capturing them reasonably well.

I have listed below, in no particular order, statements that represent emerging themes within the data. They do not represent the views of every individual I interviewed but they do recur across the transcripts.

I think that the easiest way for you to provide feedback quickly would be for you to highlight the comments below that *broadly reflect* your lived experience and simply return this email to me. If there are any statements that you find particularly problematic, please feel free to comment further on these. Of course, if you wish to make any additional comments, please feel free to do so, as well.

Finally, if I don't hear back from you ***on or before May 1*** (I recognize that this is a busy time, particularly in these COVID-19 times), I will presume you find these statements to resonate with you and I will carry on with completing my paper.

Here are some of the themes:

Elements of institutional succession planning found to be most helpful:

- Leaders who are present, if not physically, at least psychologically. That is, where people feel that leaders are engaged and accessible.
- Conversational guidance, where there is purposeful conversation between supervisors and employees that helps to construct possible career pathways for the employees
- Being tapped on the shoulder as a way of encouragement by either a supervisor or other leader
- Embedding career planning and development conversations in performance management processes
- Learning by doing; that is, employees being offered opportunities to learn by taking on new projects or tasks to expand leadership competencies
- In-house aspiring leader training programs

How leaders would like to see their institution's succession planning change:

- At the very least, simply start talking about it at all levels: individual, organizational, and inter-organizational
- Have more formalized processes, while still allowing for nuance, creativity, and agency for both employee and supervisor
- Stronger institutional prioritization
- Institutions to define their leadership philosophy to inform the processes
- Encourage more mentoring – either formally or informally
- Encourage more executive or cognitive coaching, where funding allows

Thank you for helping further our understanding of succession planning and leadership development in Canada. I remain grateful for having had the opportunity to interview you last [insert month] as part of this project. Upon completion of my thesis, I will send you a copy of my thesis as per your request in your signed informed consent form.

I wish you and your institution well as we navigate through these extraordinary times.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Snauwaert

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